

THE SEALED BOX

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE SEALED BOX</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. HAND OF DOOM</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. THE LONE CLUE</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER III. FROM THE DARK</u>	8
<u>CHAPTER IV. LARRY'S RETURN</u>	12
<u>CHAPTER V. TRAIL OF THE COIN</u>	17
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE LONG PLUNGE</u>	20
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE VANISHED BOX</u>	24
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE HIDDEN THREAT</u>	27
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW ACCEPTS</u>	31
<u>CHAPTER X. VOSGLE'S VISITOR</u>	35
<u>CHAPTER XI. LARRY LISTENS</u>	39
<u>CHAPTER XII. LARRY FINDS TROUBLE</u>	43
<u>CHAPTER XIII. FRENZIED MINUTES</u>	47
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE LAW'S ERROR</u>	50
<u>CHAPTER XV. STRANGE RESCUE</u>	54
<u>CHAPTER XVI. VOSGLE GIVES ADVICE</u>	58
<u>CHAPTER XVII. AT THE CAIRO CLUB</u>	63
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. DOUBLE CAPTURE</u>	67
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE TRAIL REVERSED</u>	71
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE CASE RESTS</u>	75
<u>CHAPTER XXI. SEALED DOOM</u>	79

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- CHAPTER I. HAND OF DOOM
- CHAPTER II. THE LONE CLUE
- CHAPTER III. FROM THE DARK
- CHAPTER IV. LARRY'S RETURN
- CHAPTER V. TRAIL OF THE COIN
- CHAPTER VI. THE LONG PLUNGE
- CHAPTER VII. THE VANISHED BOX
- CHAPTER VIII. THE HIDDEN THREAT
- CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW ACCEPTS
- CHAPTER X. VOSGLE'S VISITOR
- CHAPTER XI. LARRY LISTENS
- CHAPTER XII. LARRY FINDS TROUBLE
- CHAPTER XIII. FRENZIED MINUTES
- CHAPTER XIV. THE LAW'S ERROR
- CHAPTER XV. STRANGE RESCUE
- CHAPTER XVI. VOSGLE GIVES ADVICE
- CHAPTER XVII. AT THE CAIRO CLUB
- CHAPTER XVIII. DOUBLE CAPTURE
- CHAPTER XIX. THE TRAIL REVERSED
- CHAPTER XX. THE CASE RESTS
- CHAPTER XXI. SEALED DOOM

CHAPTER I. HAND OF DOOM

THE silence of a sultry night lay over the old mansion. Dim lights from the windows were feeble against that outside blackness. Set far back from the street, the house was isolated amid the clusters of trees that girded the spacious lawn.

The mansion seemed strangely remote, despite the fact that it was located in the suburbs of Southbury, a city that had nearly one hundred thousand inhabitants. The only feature that offset the shrouded aspect of the house was the circling ray of an airway beacon that topped a neighboring slope.

Every half minute, that beam suddenly revealed a tall line of Lombardy poplars; sweeping along the row of ghostly trees, it flashed a glimpse of the mansion's gray-stone wall.

Within the house was a melancholy front hall, that absorbed most of the light from two wall brackets. The hall merged into the darkness of a broad stairway; and all was black above, except when the passing glare revealed a short stretch of landing near a side window, just past the head of the stairs.

A whitish figure appeared at the top of the stairway, to hover there, ghost-like.

THE SEALED BOX

The beacon's gleam slid past. It showed the figure to be a girl, attired in nightgown and light kimono. There was a flash of a charming, rounded face, framed against dark hair that hung over slender shoulders. Dark eyes sparkled anxiously, small lips showed a twinge of consternation as the girl shrank back into darkness.

The light passed; she started down the stairs. Her slippers produced a slight clatter, that made the girl pause. By the time the beacon gave its next flash of the vacant hall above, the girl's slippers were off. Her bare feet made no sound as she stole to the bottom of the stairs.

Crossing the dim hall, the girl reached a deep-set door. Her light hand turned the knob. Pressing the door gently inward, the girl peered into a room where two men were seated.

One was white-haired; his kindly, deep-lined face was known to every one in Southbury. He was Richard Whilton, owner of this mansion. Whilton was esteemed for his philanthropy. Within the past two years, he had distributed a fortune among the poor of his home city.

Whilton's visitor was a middle-aged man, tall, brisk of manner, despite his heavy build. His eyes had a clear, steady gaze that went well with the firm set of his long-jawed chin. He, too, was well known in Southbury. He was James Belver, champion of reform, a man of action who had driven crooked politicians from the city.

"I SAY that I have a gift for Southbury," declared Whilton, speaking dryly, from across his desk. "This time, Belver, it is not mere money. I intend to produce evidence that will expose the master grafter who gouged millions from this city!"

"That is impossible, Whilton!" exclaimed Belver, his tone an emphatic basso. "Only one man knew who the hidden rogue was; and that man is dead."

"You refer to Mayor Dylan," nodded Whilton. "His suicide, of course, ended the trail. But Dylan left a written confession; in it, he mentioned a certain sealed box "

"Stamped with his own official seal," added Belver, "and containing documents that would incriminate the master-crook we seek. Unfortunately, Dylan's house was ransacked by the criminal himself. All Dylan's official property was stolen. The sealed box must have been taken at that time."

For answer, Whilton opened a desk drawer. He produced a flattish, black metal box, tightly bound with twisted wire. The ends of the wire met on the center of the lid. There, Belver saw a thick circle of red wax, that bore the imprint of an official seal.

"Dylan's own seal!" exclaimed Belver. "The one that was never found. The box is intact "

"Which means," put in Whilton, "that it is the one mentioned in Dylan's confession. One of his relatives found the box and sent it to me. To-morrow, Belver, I want you to name a committee of men qualified to open this box and make the contents public."

"Why not give the box to our present mayor? Or to the chief of police?"

"You can name them on your committee, Belver. But I prefer to have you see that the facts are made public. You have just bought the Daily Enterprise; the power and prestige of the press is something to be considered."

Belver nodded. He could visualize the huge sensation that this news would create in Southbury. But he was eager as he eyed the box; that was why he questioned:

THE SEALED BOX

"Why not form the committee tonight?"

Whilton pondered; then, slowly, he gave his explanation.

"I have a mysterious friend," said Whilton, "who calls himself The Shadow. He aided me once in the past, when crime threatened. I have notified The Shadow that I have learned something concerning the exposure of another crime, that I may need his cooperation in trapping the master-criminal. I expect a visit from him, to-night."

Belver's clear eyes showed wonderment. Whilton noted it; with a smile, he assured his friend that The Shadow was an actual personage, although Whilton admitted that he did not know the mysterious being's identity.

Belver was impressed. As he arose from his deep chair, he expressed his willingness to be ready in the morning. He was considering names of men for his committee, when a sudden thought occurred to him. He questioned:

"Does any one else know that you have received this box?"

"My niece, Eunice." Whilton was referring to the girl who still stood, unnoticed, outside the study door. "I showed her the box and told her what it was. Eunice can be trusted."

"What about the servants?"

"They know nothing." Whilton paused; then added: "It happens, though, that Rufus Vosgle was here this evening."

"In this room?" demanded Belver, anxiously. "Where he could see the sealed box?"

"Vosgle was here," admitted Belver. "Alone, for a few minutes, while we were finishing dinner. Afterward, I talked with him "

"But where was the box during that time?"

"In the desk drawer, all the while."

"Was the drawer unlocked?"

"Yes. I remember that, because I opened the drawer after Vosgle had gone. That was when I showed the box to Eunice."

BELVER paced the floor. His lips were compressed, as though holding back some statement. Whilton saw it.

"I know you do not approve of Vosgle," said the old man. "Nor do I, Belver. I must admit, though, that I have always found him to be a competent attorney. He is the best lawyer in this city."

"Certainly," agreed Belver, "if you call the smartest the best. Plenty of crooks have found Vosgle a good lawyer. That's why they hire him to defend them."

"I know it. To-day, I would never choose Vosgle as a counselor. It simply happens that he was my attorney before he went into criminal practice. Ethically, he had a right to do so. He and I have argued the point, often."

THE SEALED BOX

Belver shook his head.

"Perhaps I am prejudiced," he admitted. "I cannot tolerate crime in any form. If I were a lawyer, I would never defend a criminal. Somehow, I feel that a lawyer who does so should be branded as a crook himself. But since you trust Vosgle, I am satisfied."

Belver shook hands with Whilton. Eunice took that opportunity to slide away from the door. She was on the stairs when her uncle and his visitor came out through the hall. When the big front door closed, Whilton went back to his study, without a glance toward the second floor.

Stealing upstairs to her room, Eunice reached the other side of the house. She heard the rhythm of Belver's smooth-motored car. She watched the taillights twinkle as the big machine rolled from the driveway.

After that, stillness and gloom were complete. Not even the flickers of the airway beacon were visible from the side of the house where the girl's room was located.

BELOW, Richard Whilton sat, troubled, at his desk. In front of him lay the sealed box, its black surface shiny beneath the desk lamp. He pictured two men. Whilton saw what this box could mean to each.

James Belver, the reformer, who had accomplished everything except the capture of the man who had managed evil. Rufus Vosgle, whose law practice had thrived during those days when graft and corruption were rampant.

To Belver, the opening of the box would be the final triumph of a long, hard-fought cause. To Vosgle, it might mean disaster; the revelation of some name that the lawyer already knew, but wanted to keep dark.

Would Vosgle throw over one interest, to protect another? Would he, an attorney, pry into the affairs of a client like Whilton, if the defense of some criminal lay at stake?

Whilton feared that he would. The recollection that Vosgle had been alone in this room, with access to the sealed box, was a memory that brought beads of perspiration to the aged philanthropist's brow. He hoped that The Shadow's arrival would not be long delayed.

The Shadow would come by air. With that thought, Whilton turned off the lights, all except the small, shaded lamp on the desk. He went to the window; raised the shade, to breathe the comfortable air. It had been very hot in the study, with the shades drawn.

Whilton stood at the window, while the beacon light revolved, lashing its stream of light through the poplars.

Just as the rays were again streaking toward him, Whilton heard the thrum of a distant motor. A plane was guiding by the beacon, to make a landing at an airport a few miles beyond.

The passing light showed Whilton's smile, as he stepped back from the window. The old philanthropist was turning toward his desk, confident that The Shadow would soon be with him. There was a stir outside the window, that Whilton did not hear. A crouching figure arose, just as the light of the beacon passed. The sill was low; the lurker cautious, as well as powerful. He came over the edge and into the room without Whilton hearing him.

Whilton had senses keener than his ears. Just as he reached his desk, he gained the impression that he was not alone. He wheeled; in the gloom he saw a face that he recognized. An instant later, a springing assailant was upon him.

THE SEALED BOX

A gunshot sounded; deep beneath Whilton's coat, the report was almost completely muffled. That one shot was sufficient. The assailant had shoved the revolver muzzle against Whilton's heart. The old man slumped from the murderer's grasp.

The revolver was pocketed. Two hands came beneath the desk lamp, grasped the sealed box that Whilton had fought to guard. Turning, the killer sprang quickly toward the window, vaulted through. He was running, huddled low behind a hedge, when the beacon light again arrived.

All that the passing brilliance showed was the floor of the study, on a line between the window and the desk. There, bathed in the instantaneous glow, lay the body of Richard Whilton, face upward. A killer had done his evil work, to carry away the sealed box as a trophy.

That murderer was fortunate. He had accomplished his deed of death before the arrival of The Shadow.

CHAPTER II. THE LONE CLUE

WITHIN fifteen minutes after the murder of Richard Whilton, a blocky, beefy-faced man arrived at the Southbury city hall. The arrival was Police Chief Mulley, mainspring of the law in Southbury.

When he reached his office, Mulley found James Belver awaiting him there. The police chief was apologetic when he spoke to the reformer.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Belver. I was notified that you had come here; but I was out at the Cairo Club."

"Quite all right, Chief Mulley. I am glad, though, that you have arrived. I have a matter so important that it cannot be delayed."

"If it's about the Cairo Club," began Mulley, "we can't do much about the place. There's some bad-looking eggs hanging around that joint, but we've got nothing on them. As for that blond dame, Theda Morenz, she was cleared of the blackmail charge "

Belver's impatient headshake told Mulley that he was on the wrong track. The police chief decided to listen.

"Only twenty minutes ago," explained Belver, in a deep, tense tone, "I talked with Richard Whilton. He has just acquired the sealed box mentioned in Dylan's confession."

Mulley stood dumfounded. He couldn't believe Belver's statement. The sealed box had long been given up as a lost cause.

"Whilton wants to hold the box until to-morrow," continued Belver. "But there are others who know that he has it. One, in particular, is Rufus Vosgle."

The police chief showed a savage glare.

"Vosgle knows a lot of crooks," he growled. "It was him that got Theda Morenz out of her jam. You've got to watch who you pinch in this town, just on account of Vosgle."

Grabbing the telephone, the chief put in a call. Belver heard him order a squad of plain-clothes men for immediate duty.

THE SEALED BOX

"You apparently agree with my opinion, chief," declared Belver. "Whilton should be protected while he has that box in his possession. At the same time, it would not be right to enter his grounds, or to disturb him. He spoke to me in confidence, when he showed me the sealed box."

"We'll be careful," promised Mulley. "You and I can drive around the place in my car. If everything's all right, I'll post the men clear outside the grounds."

EVERYTHING was not all right at Whilton's; but that fact was already recognized, while Belver and the police chief were in conference. The city hall was a full ten minutes' driving distance from Whilton's mansion; and events were due before Belver could arrive with the police.

The sweeping beacon showed the line of poplars, motionless; below, it revealed blackness, nothing else. Yet there was a stir in that darkness, the moment that the light had flashed away. A tall, cloaked figure was moving invisibly through the night.

The Shadow, arriving from the airport, had spied the lifted shade at the window of Whilton's study. The beacon light had shown the interior of a seemingly empty room. Yet that room, judging from the appearance of the house, was the only place where Whilton would logically be.

The Shadow reached the house wall. Entering over the low sill, he saw why the room had looked deserted. Whilton's body was conspicuous on the floor; the bloodstain on the murdered man's shirt front told its own story.

By the glow of the desk lamp, The Shadow studied the body. He shifted with each arrival of the beacon light, so that his own shape was always blended with some blackness. After that inspection, The Shadow went to the desk, to make a search there.

His examination produced nothing of value, until he returned again to Whilton's body. Lifting the dead weight easily. The Shadow peered along the floor beneath. He saw a glimmer; his gloved hand was prompt to pick up the object, just as he settled the body back in place.

Swinging away from the arriving beacon light, The Shadow crouched beyond the desk, to examine the one clue that he had gained.

The object was a gold coin, of Spanish mintage. Its ordinary value was about ten dollars; but the date showed that the coin was more than a hundred years old. In excellent condition, the gold piece probably had a high collector's value.

It was possible that the coin had dropped from Whilton's vest pocket during the struggle; but it was just as likely that the murderer had lost it. Because of the last-named prospect, The Shadow placed the coin in a pocket beneath his cloak.

Richard Whilton had requested The Shadow's visit to Southbury, with the promise that he would allow the cloaked investigator full leeway in a certain matter that concerned crime. Whilton's death, itself, was a matter for investigation. The Shadow was taking over that case, as a preliminary step to the subject that Whilton had mentioned but had not specified in detail.

THE dimmed lights of an automobile were moving slowly along the road beyond the line of poplars. They attracted The Shadow's attention. They were gone from sight before the beacon's flash came by; but as The Shadow watched, he saw the car return. It came to a stop. The lights were extinguished.

THE SEALED BOX

Moving close to the window, The Shadow waited. Pressed against the wall, he gained occasional glimpses of the lawn when the sweep of light went by. The Shadow could see men deploying around the mansion. From their actions, he judged that they were detectives from Southbury.

Ordinarily, The Shadow would have found no difficulty in slipping through a closing police cordon. All that he needed was a suitable exit from the ground floor, either through a door or a window. His logical choice lay on the other side of the house, since the raised shade in Whilton's study had attracted the law toward that room.

That was why The Shadow started across the hall. Chance was to prove the move a bad one.

There was a sudden clangor of the front doorbell. Seeing a passage on the other side of the hall, The Shadow glided toward it; once in darkness, he listened, hearing a sound from upstairs. At this late hour it was likely that the summons would be answered from that direction.

As it happened, Eunice had heard the bell and was coming to the stairs. But there was another arrival due, at the very moment when The Shadow least expected him.

A door jerked open from the rear of the passage. The light from the kitchen showed The Shadow. Out popped a servant, who had been in the kitchen ever since Belver's visit. Chunky, powerful, the fellow was the sort who didn't wait to ask questions.

The servant was flinging himself upon The Shadow as the cloaked visitor turned to meet him. Thrusting gloved hands to halt the servant's charge, The Shadow made a quick, backward step. That move would have given him the vantage, but for the wide, sweeping curve of the stairway's bottom step. The Shadow stumbled against it; caught himself by shoving his shoulder to the newel post. That moment's interval brought the driving servant upon him.

Bowled over by the charge, The Shadow grappled as he went. His powerful fists caught hands that tried to clutch his throat. The Shadow and his adversary spun as they fell. Neither had the advantage when they hit the floor, out in the big hall.

Eunice saw the spill, from halfway down the stairs. In the dim light, The Shadow was recognizable only as a mass of fighting blackness; but the girl recognized the servant and raised a loud cry:

"Gilbert! What's the trouble?"

Gilbert was in no position to respond. He and The Shadow were coming up together while furious pounds sounded at the front door, telling that Eunice's call had been heard outdoors. The girl saw the servant stretched toward the high ceiling, then fly through the air under The Shadow's heaving lunge.

It was a hard jolt for Gilbert, but The Shadow gave him the benefit. Delayed in his plunge, the servant had time to thrust his arms ahead of him. He flattened; then came dizzily to hands and knees, temporarily out of combat. But the delay of softening it for Gilbert was a serious matter for The Shadow.

A pair of brawny detectives came piling from the death room. They had entered the house through the study window.

THE SHADOW wheeled across in front of the stairs. There was a shout from the kitchen door; another pair of dicks had entered by the back of the house.

THE SEALED BOX

As revolvers gleamed, The Shadow made a sudden feint toward the front door. There, he saw Gilbert, on hands and knees, yanking back the big bolt.

Before detectives could aim, The Shadow wrestled Gilbert away; swung the fellow about, knowing that the dicks would not fire at the servant. Gilbert had managed to get the bolt loose; the front door whammed inward, to admit a trio of detectives who had been hammering there.

With a spin, The Shadow clamped one hand to the light switch, plunged the hall into darkness. With a side shove, The Shadow sent Gilbert toward the last bunch of detectives; then performed a twisty dive through the darkness of the hall.

There was chaos in the hall; shouts, while detectives grappled for their invisible quarry. There were no shots; for the dicks had no target, but some revolver hands made slugging motions in the air. The confusion carried to the front walk, where James Belver was dashing up with the police chief. They arrived in time to hear the hoarse voices of detectives:

"We've got him!"

"Hang onto the guy!"

"Find that light switch!"

BELVER and Mulley were in the doorway when the lights came on. They saw a cluster of detectives piled upon their prisoner, with two extra dicks on the floor, rubbing their heads. Their own pals had tapped them neatly during the fray; but they didn't mind it, since the capture had been made.

Eunice, on the stairway, was staring downward. She could see better from above. The girl was the first to give a surprised exclamation as the group disentangled itself. The prisoner who came up from the floor, under the gripping hands of three detectives, was Gilbert!

The dicks who had entered by the front door showed pleased grins; for they thought they had the right man. Growls from the other detectives told them that they were wrong. They gaped when they learned that there had been two fighters, not one. They had seen no one but Gilbert; The Shadow had doused the lights before they spied him, also.

Spreading, the detectives formed a circle, covering the front door and the two side exits. That circle reached the stairway, where Eunice stood. There wasn't another outlet; yet the center of the hall was vacant, except for Gilbert, who puffed as he went to the stairs and sat down there.

Those dicks who had spoken of a cloaked opponent received the doubting glares of the dicks who had grabbed Gilbert. Talk of a mysterious battler in black sounded like a pipe-dream.

The Shadow had vanished completely from the scene of the swift fray.

CHAPTER III. FROM THE DARK

WITH half a dozen witnesses to testify that The Shadow had been in the hallway, the police chief gave prompt orders to search for the mysterious invader. He detailed his entire squad of detectives to search the grounds.

THE SEALED BOX

James Belver accompanied the police chief into the study, to examine Whilton's body. Gilbert joined them, while Eunice remained in the hall. The girl took the news of her uncle's death bravely. She had feared that harm would come to Richard Whilton, because he possessed the sealed box.

Alone, Eunice felt worried. At times, she glanced toward the darkened stairs, watching the occasional flashes that streaked the hallway above. At last, she decided to enter the study and be with the others.

Police Chief Mulley was growling accusations when Eunice arrived.

"That fellow in the cloak," he denounced. "We've got to find him! He's the murderer."

"I'm not so sure of that," objected Belver. "Whilton spoke of a mysterious friend, whom he called The Shadow. He said that person was going to visit him to-night."

"The Shadow, eh?" The police chief turned to Eunice. "Did your uncle tell you anything about him?"

Eunice shook her head. The only mention that she had heard concerning The Shadow was the statement that Whilton had made to Belver. Eunice didn't mention that she had listened in on that conference. She stated, however, that she had happened to come from her room; that from the upstairs hall, she had seen her uncle bid good night to Belver.

"Mr. Belver came here at ten o'clock," summed the police chief. "He left at quarter past, to reach my office at ten-thirty, because that's when I was informed at the Cairo Club that Mr. Belver had called from the city hall."

"I reached my office at quarter of eleven; and by eleven o'clock we were back here. That's when we uncovered The Shadow. He put up a fight and slipped us. We find Whilton murdered, the sealed box gone. That makes The Shadow Suspect No. 1."

Belver reminded that Whilton had spoken of The Shadow as a friend. It didn't impress the police chief. He said that a friend would have stayed to explain himself.

Chief Mulley ordered the search to tighten; to close in upon the house itself. As he shouted orders through the door, a new arrival approached the portal. Mulley stepped aside; a tall, stoop-shouldered man entered. Eunice recognized the shrewd, pointed face that was topped by gray hair.

The arrival was her uncle's attorney, Rufus Vosgle.

WHEN the lawyer saw Whilton's body, he shook his head sadly. Sharply, he asked for details of Whilton's death and received them. He registered amazement when he heard about the sealed box. He acted as if he couldn't believe that the box had been in the study, when he made the early evening visit.

"We have Whilton's statement that the box was here," remarked Belver, watching the lawyer closely. "Eunice and I both can testify to it."

"Whilton should have told me," declared Vosgle. "This is just one more instance that proves how unwise a man can be, by not showing full confidence in his attorney. Whilton's mistake produced his death. However, that is past." The lawyer swung to the police chief. "The present problem," Vosgle added, "is to capture this man who calls himself The Shadow."

"Just what I was telling Mr. James Belver "

THE SEALED BOX

Belver himself interrupted the police chief's statement.

"Don't forget," he reminded, "that three quarters of an hour elapsed between the time of my departure and the time when we found The Shadow. Some one else could have entered meanwhile."

"But there is no proof that any one did," inserted Vosgle, coldly. "It is the law's duty to arrest The Shadow."

"So that you can defend him in court," snapped Belver. "That's your specialty, Vosgle, getting suspects out of trouble. It looks like you're trying to acquire another client, ready made."

Vosgle's eyes showed a dark, cold glitter the sort of gaze that the lawyer gave to juries.

"If The Shadow is arrested," the lawyer told Belver, "I shall not defend his case. Let that be understood beforehand, Belver."

"You'd like to see him take the blame, I suppose," retorted Belver. "You wouldn't want to handle the case and fluke it. If you're protecting the real criminal, Vosgle, I'd say that "

The police chief stepped between the pair. Belver managed, though, to complete his last shot:

"I'd say that you'd better account for your own whereabouts, Vosgle, between the hours of ten and eleven!"

DURING the argument, Eunice had gained a sudden determination. She hurried up to the second floor, before the detectives came in to search the house. Reaching her room, Eunice turned on a small light and opened a bureau drawer. From it, she brought a .22 automatic. Holding the gun, she put her hand into the pocket of her kimono.

A whispered laugh tinged the gloom behind her. Eunice spun wildly, bringing the gun from her pocket. She saw The Shadow; he had stepped from the darkness of the wall, to face the girl with folded arms. Eunice met the gaze of burning eyes; but her face was determined as she spoke.

"I was sure that you passed me on the stairs," asserted the girl. "That is why I came up here. I am turning you over to the law. You are suspected of my uncle's murder."

The Shadow remained motionless. Eunice heard the whisper from his hidden lips.

"I expected you," was The Shadow's reply. "That is why I waited. I was your uncle's friend. I need every fact that pertained to his death. You can supply many."

It dawned on Eunice instantly that The Shadow could have departed before this. That, in itself, was proof that The Shadow depended on Eunice.

The Shadow was wanted by the law. But there remained a doubt in Eunice's mind; and The Shadow's own presence settled it.

The whispered tone, those steady burning eyes, inspired the girl's confidence. Eunice desired the capture of her uncle's murderer; and two facts impressed her. She was sure that The Shadow was not the culprit; also, that he far more than the local police chief was the person, who could trace the actual killer.

Eunice's hand replaced the gun in her pocket. Low-voiced, Eunice poured out the story of the sealed box. She told of the earlier visit of Rufus Vosgle; of the conference between Whilton and Belver.

THE SEALED BOX

Footsteps, voices from the stairs. Detectives were coming up. Eunice's lovely eyes were filled with anxiety. She no longer wanted The Shadow trapped; but feared that she could not prevent it.

A whispered voice reassured her. The Shadow's hand stretched forward; upon the thin-gloved palm, Eunice saw the Spanish gold piece. She heard The Shadow inquire:

"Did this belong to your uncle?" Eunice shook her head negatively; then asked:

"You found it in the study?"

The Shadow gave an affirmative reply.

"The murderer must have dropped it!" exclaimed Eunice. Then, her tone strained: "Quickly! You must leave!"

The Shadow swung from the light. He blended with the darkness of the open window. He dropped soundlessly to the ground beneath.

Detectives entered; Eunice assured them that there could be no one hiding in her room, but, as an afterthought, she requested that they search.

During that hunt, Eunice looked from the window. She breathed relief. Seemingly, The Shadow had picked his way through the police cordon. He, the one friend upon whom her uncle most depended, was free to continue the quest for the murderer who had stolen the sealed box.

WITH the search ended, the police chief left detectives in charge. He arranged for the removal of Whilton's body; then rode downtown with James Belver.

Rufus Vosgle followed; midnight found him still in the police chief's office, smoking a long cigar. Belver was there, too. He became suddenly suspicious when a telephone call came for the lawyer.

Hanging up, Vosgle ignored Belver, to speak to the police chief.

"A friend of Whilton's just arrived at the depot," said the lawyer. "He called the house and learned of Whilton's death; that's why he called here. I told him to come over."

"Who is he?"

The question was from Belver. Vosgle paid no attention until the police chief also asked it. Then, the lawyer replied:

"A man named Lamont Cranston. A New York millionaire. I remember that Whilton often mentioned him."

Belver recalled the same. Cranston was a sponsor of a museum that had received several gifts from Richard Whilton.

WHEN Cranston reached the police chief's office, he impressed every one there. The arrival was a tall, calm-faced personage, whose hawkish features had a masklike expression that made it impossible to gauge his age.

Cranston heard the details of Whilton's death in a solemn fashion. The questions that he asked, coupled with his quiet manner, were such that the police chief did not begin to guess that this visitor was the very person

THE SEALED BOX

whose arrest he sought. For the role of Lamont Cranston, wealthy globe-trotter, was one The Shadow adopted often.

The final question that The Shadow asked was one that awakened the police chief's approval, and produced sudden interest on the part of James Belver.

"What about Whilton's estate?" inquired the visitor. "Who will benefit by his death? That is something that should be considered."

All eyes turned to Vosgle. The lawyer had the answer.

"The bulk of the half million will be divided," declared Vosgle, "between Eunice Whilton and certain charities. There are a few small legacies to servants like Gilbert; also a larger one" Vosgle paused momentarily "to a young man named Larry Sherrin."

"Larry Sherrin!" exclaimed Belver. "I remember him! He worked for Whilton once. But I thought "

What Belver thought, he did not add. He seemed perplexed about the matter. It was Vosgle who provided the dry explanation.

"Whilton once intended to make Sherrin his junior partner," declared the lawyer. "There was some misunderstanding, that caused Sherrin to give up that opportunity. But evidently Whilton forgot the matter afterward, for his will provides a fifty-thousand-dollar legacy to Larry Sherrin."

The mention of so large a sum brought another stare from Belver. Vosgle arose, decided that he was going home. He offered to take Cranston to the hotel, and the visitor accepted.

Once Lamont Cranston was alone in his hotel room, his thin lips showed a smile. He had expected to hear mention of Larry Sherrin, for he knew much more regarding that young man than did either Vosgle or Belver.

Larry Sherrin was absent from Southbury; but, with fifty thousand dollars awaiting him, he would have reason to return.

When Larry Sherrin reached the city, he might become a vital factor in the trapping of Whilton's murderer. The Shadow had reasons to foresee that prospect. That was why, as Cranston, The Shadow promptly prepared a coded telegram. Going down to the hotel lobby, he dispatched the wire to New York.

The Shadow knew that Larry's arrival would not be immediate. Therefore, The Shadow decided to remain in Southbury, for the present. There was a chance that he might uncover important facts while he waited.

That chance was to develop more rapidly than The Shadow supposed. Already, a master-plotter was scheming a clever cover-up for his murder of Richard Whilton. Through his next move, the hidden crook intended to weave a new web of circumstance that would bring complete disaster to The Shadow.

CHAPTER IV. LARRY'S RETURN

LARRY SHERRIN was far from Southbury; so far away, that his thoughts seldom reverted to the city where he had once lived. But Larry could never forget Southbury entirely; because the years that he had spent there were responsible for his present location.

THE SEALED BOX

Larry was in a place where steady waves rolled upon a coral beach, studded with lazy-waving palm trees a spot where he had come to regard life as pleasant and worth while.

There were others who lived on this West Indian isle. Like Larry, they had unpleasant memories of the past; but found the present welcome. They were satisfied, too, that the future offered promise.

Larry was thinking over that fact, on the morning after the death of Richard Whilton. He had not yet received the news of murder in Southbury.

A crew of husky men were building a house some distance from the beach. Larry was on hand, checking over a floor plan and tabulating a list of needed material.

He was a good-looking chap, Larry Sherrin, with keen face and friendly, blackish eyes that matched his tousled hair. His grin, too, was pleasant.

There had been a time, though, when Larry's features had shown a hardness; when his eyes were sullen, his lips more apt to sneer than smile. Some of the men working on the house showed traces of a surliness that reminded Larry of his former character. That didn't make Larry dislike them. They'd snap out of it, when they'd been on this island as long as Larry had.

His check-up finished, Larry turned about to meet a cheery chap in overalls. The fellow greeted him with the message:

"Mr. Farrow wants to see you, Larry. He's in the office."

Larry followed a beaten path that led to a large community house. In the office, Larry found Slade Farrow, the man who supervised the island. Though past middle age, Farrow was still a man of action. His face was rugged, as well as genial.

His manner was easy as he invited Larry to take a chair; but there was a seriousness in Farrow's look that made the young man realize that this summons was important.

"There are some matters that we must discuss," declared Farrow, soberly. "They concern the past, Larry. Therefore, I must recall the reason why you came here."

"Go ahead, Mr. Farrow," returned Larry. "I haven't forgotten it, though."

"FIVE years ago," said Farrow, "you embezzled the sum of fifty thousand dollars from your employer, Richard Whilton. You tried to shift the blame on other persons. You intended further crime in Southbury; chiefly robbery, wherein you would maintain your own position while you employed a band of criminals."

Soberly, Larry nodded his acceptance of Farrow's indictment.

"Fortunately," continued Farrow, "your scheme was frustrated. You were trapped and captured by The Shadow, while you were attempting to break open Whilton's safe. Your full guilt was made known to Richard Whilton."

Farrow paused. It was Larry who added:

"He gave me a better break than I deserved. I belonged in the penitentiary; but Whilton didn't see it that way. I could only dig up half of what I'd stolen; but he said that would square it, if I did what The Shadow ordered."

THE SEALED BOX

"That was why The Shadow sent you here," explained Farrow. "Some people would term this island a crime colony; but I would define it differently."

"It's the place where men make good!" put in Larry, his eyes flashing their enthusiasm. "You know it better than I do, Mr. Farrow. There are plenty of real fellows who go crooked, without being natural criminals. That's not an alibi for what I did; but I do say that my own case is one that wouldn't occur twice."

Larry meant it. He paused, to emphasize it. He had no expectation that Farrow would take up that very theme. Larry was stunned, when Farrow quietly announced:

"You will soon have your opportunity to prove it, Larry."

"You mean" Larry was troubled "that I'm going back to Southbury? But, but I like it here. I suppose" Larry was almost rueful "that I have no say in the matter "

"On the contrary," interposed Farrow, "the matter is entirely one of your choice. I shall explain the circumstances."

While Larry listened, Farrow looked from the window, across to the sea beyond the coral isle. Larry was right. This colony was one where men did make good, once removed from an environment where crime could be a lure.

They had freedom here, with contentment. Life was composed of sane desires; it lacked the causes that inspired greed and selfishness.

For years, a colony like this had been Farrow's dream. As a criminologist, Farrow had studied crooks within the walls of prisons (Note: See "The Green Box." Vol. IX, No. 2.). He knew that some were incorrigible, habitual criminals whose ways could not be changed.

But there were others, whose lot Farrow had always regretted men whose urge toward crime had been largely a matter of environment. Farrow had always wanted to test such individuals in places where they would have no occasion to steal; where envy of other persons' possessions could not become a mania.

Farrow knew how bitter the struggle for existence could be to men who felt themselves handicapped from the start. He knew that the only cure was to grant them immunity from conditions that soured them.

The Shadow had produced the place that Farrow wanted: this island, where Farrow, himself, had full control. The Shadow had supplied the inhabitants, as well, by selecting subjects from among the criminals he conquered.

All who were eligible were given their choice. Most of them picked the island in preference to a penitentiary. Once here, they wanted to stay. Larry Sherrin was a typical example; and Farrow knew why.

Not only did Larry feel secure here; he knew that he and others of his sort had their influence upon newcomers. Larry had found a right way to live. He preferred to show his appreciation by pointing that route to others, rather than go back to the chaos of old surroundings that he no longer desired.

Larry's voice interrupted Farrow's thoughts.

"If I've got to serve time for what I did," said Larry, firmly, "I'm ready to go, Mr. Farrow. It's been no punishment to be here. Maybe I deserve some "

THE SEALED BOX

"Not at all," interrupted Farrow. "The policy here is a sensible one, Larry. Unlike penal institutions, we do not deal punishment while claiming that our purpose is reform. Nor do we boast that we have reformed a man, then send him out with a prison record pinned to him."

"No one knows that you have been here. You will return with an unmarked slate. No person ever is forced to leave here until his past is cleared and his future properly arranged. Your record, as I have said, is clear. No charges have been made against you."

"But I still owe money to Richard Whilton. Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Farrow smiled as he produced a large book. Thumbing the pages, he came to Larry's name.

"You were doing well in Whilton's employ," he said. "You had a salary of five thousand dollars a year. Whilton continued to pay it, after you came here."

"But I was no longer working for Whilton."

"You were working for The Shadow. Whilton knew your worth, and wanted to provide the proper amount for your services, because The Shadow had done much for him. The money was accepted by The Shadow; then returned to Whilton, to clear your debt."

There was gratitude in Larry's expression; the sort that Farrow had seen on the faces of other men, when they had learned how The Shadow had not forgotten them. At that moment, Larry was ready to tackle anything that The Shadow ordered; and his determination was the sort that he would not lose.

"I have mentioned the past," declared Farrow. "We come to the present. Richard Whilton is dead."

The light faded from Larry's face. The news hit him hard.

"I'd like to have seen him," he choked. "If well, if I'd seen Whilton and talked to him I think he would have understood."

"He did understand," informed Farrow. "That is why he left you fifty thousand dollars. The legacy is the reason why you must return to Southbury."

LARRY shifted in his chair. The generosity made him wince. It was a reward that he felt he did not deserve; and it troubled him. Groping for an answer, Larry found one.

"I'll go to Southbury," he told Farrow, "and as soon as I collect that money, I'll come back here with it. You say I'm worth something here; so I'll work on, and we can call my keep my pay. The fifty thousand goes to you, Mr. Farrow or to The Shadow to help the cause here."

"It will not be needed," declared Farrow. "There is a reason why you must remain in Southbury; and there is a duty that you can perform there, in return for the legacy."

Farrow paused; then added:

"Richard Whilton was murdered!"

Indignation swept over Larry. His fists clenched; then relaxed. His first impulse was desire for immediate vengeance upon the unknown killer. His next thoughts were calmer. He saw what was needed: steady, patient

THE SEALED BOX

cooperation, with The Shadow. Calmly, he said to Farrow:

"Tell me the details."

Farrow gave them; they had come in complete form by coded radio. There were other facts, too; that interested Larry, for he had lost all contact with affairs in Southbury.

"So they cleaned up the rotten politics there," he declared. "Good work; and all credit to Belver. Except that Whilton had to be murdered because the job wasn't complete. But I'll do my part to uncover the big-shot that Belver wasn't lucky enough to find.

"Let's see who I know in Southbury. James Belver, of course, because he was Whilton's closest friend. He may not know much about me; but there's another man who certainly does. That's Rufus Vosgle, the lawyer. I'll sound out both of them.

"Eunice Whilton" Larry smiled "I remember her. She was just a kid when I left Southbury. I guess she's grown up by this time. Well, Mr. Farrow, I guess they're about all who count."

Larry was trying to remember more names; he had found none, when Farrow added:

"Theda Morenz."

Larry's eyes narrowed.

"She's still in Southbury?"

Farrow nodded. Larry's face showed unpleasant recollections. His jaw set firmly, he arose from his chair, with the comment:

"I'm ready. When do I leave?"

"This morning." Farrow produced a map. "By launch to an island fifty miles west of here. There, you can board a Pan American plane. You will reach Southbury some time to-morrow."

Larry left to pack his belongings. Leaning back from his desk, Farrow pictured the task that lay ahead. It would be a hard one; more difficult than Larry supposed. For Farrow, in considering the case of the sealed box, was sure that The Shadow had undertaken a campaign against a supercrook of formidable strength.

What Farrow did not calculate was the problem of the immediate future. He did not foresee that the supercrook might make the first move against The Shadow, even before Larry arrived in Southbury.

That prospect was a real one. A stroke was due this very night, before The Shadow was ready to begin the campaign in which Larry would serve as a foil. The Shadow, too, could show eagerness in an effort to reach a master-villain. That trend had its danger.

In his office on the coral island, Slade Farrow did not guess that complete disaster would soon threaten The Shadow.

CHAPTER V. TRAIL OF THE COIN

THE Whilton murder was the entire talk of Southbury. Linked with the reign of graft that had been banished a few months before, it produced a sensation that brought in newspaper men from many large cities. They found themselves welcome, particularly at the office of the Daily Enterprise.

New owner of that crusading newspaper, James Belver announced his determination to track down Whilton's murderer. The Enterprise published every known detail that concerned the case. In so doing, the newspaper established certain theories in regard to Whilton's death.

It was obvious that some one had murdered Richard Whilton to obtain the sealed box that was known to contain incriminating evidence against a dethroned king of graft.

Whether or not the hidden big-shot was actually the murderer, was another question.

If he still ran true to form, the crime king would certainly have sent some trigger-man to murder Whilton, rather than do the deed himself. There was, however, a definite flaw to that theory. Since Belver had brought reform to Southbury, the political crooks had vanished. The big-shot might have been unable to find any one ready to commit murder on such short notice.

There were shady characters in Southbury; but most of them had their rendezvous at the Cairo Club. The police chief had been out there counting noses at the time when James Belver called him.

The Cairo Club was on the opposite side of town from Whilton's residence; hence the short stop at the city hall had been on the direct route. No one from the Cairo Club could have outraced Chief Mulley on that trip. Small-fry crooks had an air-tight alibi and were glad of it.

Another theory injected into the case was that of an outside murderer. Granting that word had leaked regarding the sealed box, some clever intruder might have seized it for himself. The man who had backed graft in Southbury would certainly pay a huge price for the box intact. That would explain another party's interest in the matter.

The basis for this new theory was the law's search for The Shadow. Whoever that mysterious being might be, he was certainly from out of town. Summoned by Whilton, he could have murdered the philanthropist, to acquire the box himself.

All that boiled down to one answer: Whoever had the sealed box was logically the murderer. That final theory took Southbury by storm. Find the sealed box and the killer who owned it!

SEATED in the lobby of his hotel, Lamont Cranston scanned the newspapers thoroughly. In the heart of the city where he was sought for a crime he had not committed, The Shadow remained unperturbed. His own relationship to the case gave him an opportunity to analyze it with little difficulty.

One man alone would have risked this murder; he was the hidden big-shot to whom the opening of the sealed box meant absolute disaster.

Finding the sealed box might already be an impossible task. The murderer's logical move would be to destroy its contents and get rid of the box itself. The right course was to seek the murderer, not the box.

At present, The Shadow had two factors to work with. One was the fact that he, himself, had become involved

THE SEALED BOX

in the Whilton case. One person knew that The Shadow was innocent; that person was the guilty man.

The master-crook would be shrewd enough to guess that The Shadow would seek vindication. To clear his own name; The Shadow would have to expose the murderer. That was one factor; but, at present, it favored the master-crook.

The other factor was the lone clue that had remained upon the scene of crime. The Shadow had acted wisely in taking that Spanish coin. By this time, the killer must certainly know that he had lost the lucky piece that he usually carried. He might make an effort to reclaim it.

There was an evening newspaper published in Southbury; to-day it had run a special early edition, but the regular issue did not appear until five o'clock. When the newspapers were delivered at the hotel news stand, Cranston purchased one.

Other buyers pored over new developments in the Whilton case. Cranston gave that news a mere glance. His keen eyes searched the third page, which contained a "Lost and Found" column.

Halfway down, The Shadow read the ad that he had scarcely hoped to find:

LOST: A gold Spanish coin, dated 1824. Return to Room 304, Central Building. Reward.

The Central Building was located near the hotel. Strolling from the hotel, Cranston went past it. The building looked ready to be torn down; for it was an antiquated structure, only three stories high, wedged in between a modern office building and a fair-size department store.

Outside the building was a board that listed the names of the persons occupying the offices. There were four spaces for each floor. The one that bore the number "304" was blank. Either the person who wanted the Spanish coin was a new tenant, or he was same one who had chosen a vacant office as a place to meet the finder.

The latter possibility was the one that seemed likely. Instead of entering the building, The Shadow circled the block. He knew that Room 304 would be in the rear corner of the building, at the right. He wanted to see its windows from the outside.

There was an open space in back of the Central Building; strolling in Cranston's leisurely fashion, The Shadow gained the view he wanted. The windows of 304 were grimy, indicating that the office was untenanted.

BACK at the hotel, other guests saw Cranston return and idly resume his accustomed chair near the lobby window. The Shadow was in no hurry to visit the office in the Central Building. He could see certain disadvantages in too early a visit.

The ad in the newspaper indicated that the man who had lost the Spanish coin was wary. If he had been sure that ownership of the gold piece would not incriminate him, he would have been more open in his method. A blind ad, leading to an empty office, smacked of a hidden scheme. Perhaps a trap for the finder of the coin.

That was why The Shadow bided his time.

His opportunity for a trip to that obscure office would come after dark. Then, The Shadow could tell if the office had been visited. Lights in the windows would proclaim the fact. Moreover, The Shadow could go in guise of black, instead of appearing as Lamont Cranston. Best of all, he could stage his arrival without being

THE SEALED BOX

seen.

Lamont Cranston dined at the hotel. In the dining room, he listened to the talk of reporters at another table. Among them was a New York newshawk named Clyde Burke. Ostensibly, Burke represented the New York Classic; actually, he was an agent of The Shadow.

There might be need for Clyde's service later, particularly after Larry Sherrin arrived in town. But that depended upon what happened to-night. If The Shadow could crack the case this evening, other plans would be unnecessary.

The reporters left early and headed for the Enterprise building. They expected to meet James Belver there; and they were talking about an interview with Rufus Vosgle. It was certain, though, that they would not find Vosgle at the Enterprise office. The feud between Belver and Vosgle was more than mere gossip.

Soon afterward, Lamont Cranston left the hotel. He followed the rear street behind the Central Building. Looking through the open space, he saw the desired sign. A dim light was gleaming from the dingy panes of Room 304.

Strolling to the depot, Cranston picked up a briefcase that he had checked there. Returning to the vicinity of the Central Building, he stepped into a spot of darkness. From the briefcase, he produced garments of black. The briefcase folded into flexible, compact form.

Soon, a silent, invisible shape was weaving through to the space behind the squalid building.

A warehouse, jutting in from the rear street, gave a sheltering wall clear to the corner of the Central Building. Directly below Room 304, The Shadow looked upward. The wall was not a difficult one to scale; but that was something for future reference. An inside route would be preferable, if it could be gained.

The Shadow found a rear door. It was unlocked; it led into a hall where only one dim light was glowing. Keeping to the sheltered wall, The Shadow reached the stairway. There, the darkness was almost complete; the second floor was no better lighted than the first. Only a flitting streak of blackness on the floor revealed The Shadow's passage. He gained the stairs to the third floor; arrived at the top to see the door marked "304."

There was no light on the third floor. All was dark, except the glow of the glass-paneled door, that indicated the room The Shadow wanted.

WHILE he paused to listen, The Shadow considered the probabilities. There was a chance, of course, that the man who had taken 304 expected a visitor other than The Shadow; at the same time, he would certainly be prepared in case a cloaked intruder entered.

That meant that the lone criminal could be lurking in the darkened hall, or hiding somewhere in the room itself. The hallway was a possibility, because it had no light.

Moving stealthily through the darkness, The Shadow probed the entire length of the hall. Satisfied, finally, that no one lurked there, The Shadow approached the lighted door.

Keeping well back so that he would not be visible against the frosted glass, The Shadow turned the knob, with imperceptible slowness. As his hand completed the turn, he drew an automatic. With a swift, twisting move, The Shadow shoved the door inward; wheeled into the room and swung his gun to cover every foot of wall space.

THE SEALED BOX

The office was empty, without a hiding place. There was a closet, but the door was wide open, as if welcoming inspection.

The only light came from a lamp that stood upon a battered desk; but the lamp was unshaded, its glow sufficient to reveal the entire room. The place certainly awaited occupancy; but the man who had appropriated the office was not present.

After listening at the door, The Shadow closed it. He looked upward, saw a trapdoor that led to the roof; but it was shut tight. The trap was just above the corner of the desk. That offered a chance to inspect it without much trouble or delay.

Placing his automatic beneath his cloak, The Shadow stepped toward the desk. He stopped, as he saw the lamp more closely.

At first view, that lamp appeared to be mounted on a square base. From an angle, the base proved oblong instead of square. That was not the only unusual feature. The lamp was off center, proving that the object beneath it was not a base at all.

Plucking the lamp from its position, The Shadow planked it in the middle of the table. For the first time, its glow gave a plain view of the flattish object that had looked like a pedestal. Wire glimmered in the light; a red blob showed from the center of a shiny black box lid.

Instead of coming here to reclaim his missing Spanish coin, the murderer had left a present for The Shadow. There, on the desk, tight-bound and intact, lay the stolen trophy that branded its owner as a killer.

The Shadow had found the sealed box that had brought death upon Richard Whilton!

CHAPTER VI. THE LONG PLUNGE

GRIPPING the sealed box, The Shadow held it close to the light. It was in his hands, that flattish casket that a whole city sought for the evidence it contained. The box that had caused the doom of Richard Whilton had come to light again.

Why?

That question was paramount in The Shadow's mind. Thousands of people held to the implicit belief that the sealed box could be recovered. Half-baked theories had led them to that conclusion. The Shadow, alone, had disagreed.

He had credited the thief as a person of sufficient foresight to mash the incriminating box beyond all recognition. Time and again, The Shadow had been right in suppositions where every one else was wrong.

This time, the situation was reversed. To The Shadow came a sudden answer. One that told him much; and with it, gave him knowledge of immediate peril. The discovery of this sealed box proved that the game had many angles; and one concerned The Shadow most directly.

The sealed box was a snare to hold him in this room. If he remained here, staring at it long enough, there would be more to come. The law wanted more than the sealed box; namely, the man who held it. This was a set-up where both could be captured.

THE SEALED BOX

Already wanted as a suspect in Whilton's death, The Shadow had walked into a perfect frame-up. If the police arrived to trap him in this room, The Shadow would be in a far worse spot than the one he had encountered last night.

The Shadow's laugh was a low-rasped tone of confidence. There was still time to depart, taking the box with him. That was why The Shadow laughed.

The sharp mirth cut short.

On the desk where the box had rested, The Shadow saw a tiny, projecting button. He pressed it flush with the desk. It came up again, forced by a spring action. Stooping, The Shadow-saw a wire running from the bottom of the desk to a socket in the floor.

The weight of the box had held that button down. Once released, the spring switch had caused an electric contact. A signal had flashed somewhere outside this building. A tip-off to the master-crook that The Shadow had taken the bait!

Precious minutes lost; during them, The Shadow's insidious foe had unquestionably chosen a course that would bring trouble to The Shadow, but leave the crook scot-free.

The simple process of an anonymous call to police headquarters, stating that The Shadow could be found in Room 304 at the Central Building. That would be enough to bring Chief Mulley and his entire force!

THE SHADOW reached the door. As he opened it cautiously, he heard muffled sounds from the floors below. The police were here, plenty of them, coming up to check on the mysterious tip-off.

Closing the door, The Shadow locked it and shifted toward the window. His black shape made a silhouette against the grimy pane. As luck had it, some distant cop happened to glimpse the outline.

A bullet pinged the window above The Shadow's head. He stepped back, just before a barrage shattered the glass to nothingness. Amid the clatter of the crashed window, The Shadow heard pounding footsteps on the stairs. Hearing the outside gunfire, police were driving upward.

There was only one chance for quick departure: the trapdoor to the roof. It was barred from above; but that didn't stop The Shadow. He snapped off the desk lamp. Springing upon the desk, he drove at the trapdoor with all his strength. It gave enough for The Shadow to wedge a gun muzzle in place.

Sliding the barrel of the automatic along the crack, The Shadow felt it hit the clamp that held the trapdoor in place. Withdrawing the .45 slightly, The Shadow jammed the muzzle hard against the clamp.

He tugged the trigger three times, keeping the gun's position despite the recoil. Those shots did the trick. They literally blew the clamp from its rivets. The Shadow's shoulders buckled the barrier upward.

There was another clatter of glass; it was the pane of the office door. The police had arrived and were smashing through. But before police revolvers could spew their stream of slugs, The Shadow's cloaked form did a huge surge upward, out to the roof.

When the police realized that The Shadow had gone, they turned their lights upward. The trap was closing into place. A few moments later, the officers were clambering upon the desk to reach the trapdoor.

THE SEALED BOX

ON the roof, The Shadow picked up the sealed box, which he had flung through ahead of him. His tiny flashlight showed the ruined clamp of the trapdoor; there was no use trying to close it. Pursuers would be wary when they thrust their heads into sight. The Shadow had time for swift departure.

He was calculating upon one important factor.

The murderer had certainly expected a visit from The Shadow. Therefore, he must have known that the Central Building would be watched from the time that the want ad appeared in the afternoon newspaper. The light in Room 304 was not a false one. The signal wire was a separate device that had been placed there.

That proved that the supercrook had visited the office in person, after dusk, to turn on the light. Knowing that The Shadow might be on watch, the killer could have come by only one route; that was the roof.

If, in brief minutes, The Shadow could retrace the villain's path, the police would find no trace of the cloaked visitant whom they had nearly trapped in Room 304.

Crouched on the roof of the squatty Central Building, The Shadow shoved the sealed box beneath his belt, while he looked for the best route. He saw the wall of the adjoining department store, rising a full floor above the Central Building. Beside that wall lay a ladder.

To most persons, that ladder would have offered opportunity to reach the store roof. The Shadow saw the fallacy of such a course. His secret enemy would not have come here through the department store.

If The Shadow chose that higher roof, he might find that there was no outlet. That would mean a trap as bad as a blind alley.

There was a better route; so well secluded that The Shadow decided instantly that it was the way that the crook had used. That was the roof of the warehouse that jutted in from the rear street. The warehouse was slightly taller than the Central Building; but it was built on lower ground. The two roofs were almost on a level.

There was a twelve-foot space between them an easy jump from the other side, but not from this direction. The slight difference in roof levels favored the warehouse. The jump would have to be a few feet upward, as well as horizontal.

The ladder was pointed toward that rear space. That told The Shadow its real purpose.

Reaching the back edge of the roof, The Shadow pulled the ladder toward him; shoved it at an upward angle across the gap to the warehouse. As soon as it was set in place, The Shadow used the ladder as a bridge. Swiftly, he crossed to the roof of the warehouse.

Crouched there, he looked back to see a head peer from the trapdoor. A policeman looked warily about the dim roof, then ducked to tell his comrades that the way looked clear. The Shadow was sure that the man hadn't seen the ladder. There was time to put it back where it belonged.

A long hard shove; the ladder slid to the roof of the Central Building and clattered there. The sound speeded the pursuers. Hoisted by men below, a cop came scrambling from the trapdoor. By the time he was rising with drawn gun, another officer was shoved through to join him.

They saw the ladder, and made the wrong guess. They thought that The Shadow had used it to reach the high roof of the department store. They shouted the news to others. Soon, an entire squad was on the roof of the

THE SEALED BOX

Central Building.

The Shadow saw them raise the ladder to the top of the department store.

THE SHADOW was far away by that time, creeping low along the flat roof of the warehouse. He had spied the objective that he wanted the only outlet from the roof. It was a skylight, at the most remote corner.

By this time, it was plain to The Shadow that the murderer must have originally entered the almost-deserted warehouse. Coming up through the skylight, he had crossed the roof and jumped to the Central Building. Reversing his route, he had needed the ladder and had used it, shoving it back to the Central Building roof.

The Shadow, therefore, had adopted the same tactics as his foe. The supercrook had not expected The Shadow to get this far in a race from the police. If he had, he might have waited at the gap between the warehouse and the Central Building.

Having encountered no one there, The Shadow was confident that his route was clear. He reached the skylight; as he expected, it was locked from the inside. But there was plenty of time to jimmy it open. The police were still waiting for reserves before they scaled the roof of the department store.

A gun muzzle served The Shadow again. He pried the metal frame of the thick-glassed skylight and encountered an inside clamp. Bullets would have settled that fastening; but The Shadow could not risk the noise.

He pried harder; the clamp gave with a dull snap that was completely muffled. Guns stowed away, The Shadow carefully raised the metal frame.

Below was pitch-blackness; that pleased The Shadow. All that he needed was a simple drop into the darkness of the top floor. Within the windowless walls of the warehouse, he could use his flashlight as he pleased. An inside stairway would lead him down to the ground floor.

As he lowered himself through the skylight, The Shadow let the heavy glass sink above him. His hands found an inside ledge; he hung there coolly, steadying himself for a short drop. He figured the warehouse floor to be about ten feet high; and he was already dangling six feet downward.

The Shadow gave a slight swing, thinking that some piece of furniture might be stored beneath him; in which case, he could step to it. The Shadow's swaying feet found nothing but vacancy, until his hands loosened for the drop.

At that instant, The Shadow kicked something straight in back of him; an object that was taut, rigid as a pole. That chance kick flashed a signal to The Shadow's brain; but it came too late. His fingers had already relaxed; starting his drop, The Shadow had no chance to regain his hold on the skylight ledge.

The Shadow had found the right route, but he had chosen the wrong way to navigate it. Swishing downward, his tall form covered the four-odd feet that The Shadow had expected. There was no stopping at that point and The Shadow knew why. There was no floor to receive him.

The object that The Shadow had kicked was an elevator cable. The blackness below was the open-shaft. Instead of taking an easy drop to safety, The Shadow was bound on a forty-foot plunge into a pit of doom!

CHAPTER VII. THE VANISHED BOX

IN that first split-second of his unexpected drop, The Shadow acted with sheer instinct. His body swaying, he managed to perform a mid-air twist, as he buckled his back and thrust his hands behind his shoulders.

His grabbing fists found the solid substance that they wanted: the heavy elevator cable that formed a slender pillar in the very center of the shaft.

It was too late for any such clutch to halt the plunge. With the added weight of his automatics and the sealed box, The Shadow was well burdened in his fall. His body had gathered momentum too great to offset. His hands were only a puny brake.

The Shadow's speed scarcely slackened. The slithering cable ripped the gloves from The Shadow's fists. His flesh was scarcely burned, for his hands had lost their grip by the time the gloves were gone.

Had The Shadow depended on that grab alone, his downward pitch would have continued at its breakneck pace. His hands, however, had accomplished something: they had managed to center the course of his fall. As they loosened, The Shadow gained another hold upon the cable, this time with his knees and legs.

The brake was more effective. The folds of The Shadow's cloak were seared; a trousers leg was cut from ankle to knee. One of The Shadow's shoes was ripped from his foot as he gained a toehold. His whole body jolted as his speed decreased.

That leg grip threw The Shadow headlong. His knees relaxed as his head and shoulders overtook them. One leg still hooking the cable, The Shadow made a last desperate effort as his fall became a dive. He twisted his arms around the cable and gripped with all his strength.

The Shadow's cloak gave purchase, though it was torn to shreds. The Shadow had the double grip he wanted; it was strong enough to prevent an increase of his speed. In fact, the effort was slackening the headlong drop; but that result couldn't last.

A few seconds more, the cable would be tearing deep into The Shadow's shoulders. That would be the end of his control. Fortunately, the shaft wasn't deep enough to provide that sequel.

The Shadow's plunge ended suddenly, when solid blackness seemed to gush up to meet him. His shoulders and head took the impact; his body floundered away from the cable, to strike the side wall of the shaft. With a twisting roll, The Shadow settled, senseless, upon an irregular surface.

The fall had been shortened by the elevator, which was at the ground floor level. Instead of concrete, The Shadow had found metal. Either was bad enough, as The Shadow's condition showed; but his strenuous efforts had saved him.

FAR from the place where searchers hunted him, The Shadow lay motionless during passing minutes. At last, he stirred; groped wearily upon his perch.

More minutes went by before The Shadow realized where he was. Dimly, he recalled the events that had finished with this unhappy landing.

Blood streaked The Shadow's face from a gash above his forehead. The slouch hat had been a buffer that prevented serious injury. The sealed box had slipped from The Shadow's belt. Groping, he found it; but as he

THE SEALED BOX

tilted the box, it slipped from his numbed hands.

The box slid edgewise through the grated top of the elevator. The Shadow heard it strike the floor of the car.

That awakened prompt thoughts of escape. The Shadow reasoned that the top of the elevator must be hinged. Otherwise, no one could use the car to reach the skylight at the top of the shaft. Fumbling, The Shadow found a catch; but his fingers were too cramped to release it. The Shadow needed a few minutes' rest.

As those minutes ticked, a sound occurred below.

It was the scrape of the elevator door, opening in the darkness. Through the grille The Shadow saw a flashlight blink. The glow settled on the sealed box. A voice muttered an oath.

The intruder was the murderer. Outside, he had watched the futile search for The Shadow. He had come here on the chance that the cloaked fugitive had taken this route. The box told part of what had happened. The murderer flicked the light upward.

The Shadow lay huddled, motionless. His shape blocked the rays. The murderer knew that The Shadow had fallen down the shaft, and he supposed that The Shadow was either dead or unconscious. It was worth while risking a few revolver shots. His face still hidden, the murderer drew a gun, to take deliberate, upward aim.

Simultaneously, The Shadow's hand dipped into the tattered remnants of his cloak. Numbed fingers were strong enough to grip an automatic. The Shadow turned his hand slowly, to sneak the muzzle through the steel slats of the elevator roof.

A slow-motion duel was in development. Another half minute would bring the result. A sudden interruption broke that space of thirty seconds. It was the clatter of the skylight, high above.

Police had come to the warehouse roof; they had found the top of the shaft.

The murderer doused his flashlight as a gleam came downward. Police saw blackness at the bottom of the shaft, but did not identify it as The Shadow. Voices buzzed; their words carried to the listeners below.

One cop intended to remain on the warehouse roof, while the other took the long route down through the Central Building. The messenger was to start a search in the warehouse.

The officers withdrew, but they left the skylight open. A whispered laugh came from The Shadow's lips. It wasn't loud enough to carry up through the shaft; the man in the elevator heard it, however.

That weird tone told the killer that his plot had failed. He couldn't risk a shot; for the police would hear it, with the skylight open. They would surround the warehouse in a hurry. The Shadow, though, could afford to fire. If he clipped the murderer, the police could capture the real crook, with the sealed box in his possession.

The Shadow's laugh predicted such an outcome. With a mad dive, the murderer left the elevator, not bothering to slam the door behind him.

PAINFULLY, The Shadow managed to rise by gripping the cable. Shoving his gun away, he groped for the latch. Though his fingers were sore and cramped, he managed to unloose the fastening. A grating dropped downward on its hinges.

THE SEALED BOX

Feet–first, The Shadow slid through and landed in the elevator. Straightening, he pushed the grate up into place.

Cautiously, The Shadow glimmered his flashlight. The sealed box was no longer in the elevator. The murderer had taken it with him in his haste. Forced to a quick decision, he had given up his scheme to plant the box on The Shadow. He had no guarantee that the police would finally trap The Shadow.

That box had to be planted on somebody who couldn't get rid of it. The murderer had learned at last that The Shadow was too formidable to be the goat in such a game.

The Shadow made his way from the elevator to the outside door. He lurked there while a pair of detectives entered. When they had passed, The Shadow went out into a deserted alleyway beside the warehouse.

The murderer had used that path before the detectives arrived, making a complete get–away with the sealed box. There was no chance to overtake him. The Shadow moved wearily toward the street.

Seeing the way clear, he ripped off his tattered cloak and bundled it with his slouch hat. In Cranston's garb, he sauntered along the street and found a taxi.

RIDING back to the hotel, The Shadow told the taxi driver to stop at the side entrance. That was necessary, for the immaculate appearance of Lamont Cranston was badly wrecked.

Once inside the hotel, The Shadow took a stairway up to his room. There, he washed the blood from his face and discarded his ruined clothes.

Wearing a light–gray suit, and a felt hat that matched it, Lamont Cranston appeared in the lobby soon afterward. The hat was necessary to hide the patch that The Shadow had applied to a cut on his head. Only one person in the lobby noted Cranston's arrival.

That person was Clyde Burke.

The reporter knew that his chief was posing as Cranston. News of a mad hunt for The Shadow had worried Clyde. Word had come in that The Shadow had been seen in the Central Building, and Clyde had wondered how his chief would fare. The calm appearance of Cranston was a great relief to Burke.

Talking to other reporters, Clyde turned the conversation to a review of all that had happened. That talk was for The Shadow's benefit. Clyde saw Cranston listening intently.

They had been at the Enterprise office, these reporters, when James Belver had been called to the telephone. Belver had come bounding from his private office, to report that he had received an anonymous call stating that The Shadow was in Room 304 of the Central Building. Belver had tried to get Police Chief Mulley, but the line was busy.

When they finally did get a call through to headquarters, the men in the Enterprise office learned that the same anonymous person had also called the police chief. A squad was already on its way, heading for the Central Building, under Mulley's own command.

The reporters had flocked to the scene, to hear the gunfire and witness the search upon the roof of the department store. Separated, they had returned to the hotel, one by one.

The desk clerk answered a telephone call. He called to the reporters and pointed to a booth.

THE SEALED BOX

"Any one of you will do. It's the Enterprise on the wire."

Clyde took the call. He came out from the booth, to tell the other newspaper men:

"It was Belver, calling from his office. Chief Mulley just stopped there, to say that they've given up the search."

"What about the tip-off?" queried one of the reporters. "Have they got any idea who made those calls to Belver and Mulley?"

"Not yet," replied Clyde. "Neither Belver nor Mulley is sure who it was."

A man had entered the lobby in time to hear those statements. He lighted a cigar; then stepped up to the reporters, a dry smile on his pointed face. The arrival was Rufus Vosgle. Reporters recognized the lawyer; they crowded about him, hoping for an interview.

"I SEEM to be popular," observed Vosgle, coolly. "Very well, gentlemen. I have a statement for you. I understand that James Belver and Chief Mulley both received anonymous calls, telling where they could find The Shadow."

There were nods. Vosgle took a long puff at his cigar.

"You may state publicly," added Vosgle, "that I received a similar call, at my home. Moreover, I believe that I was called first. I told the anonymous party" Vosgle paused, to flick ashes from his cigar "that I was not interested in crank calls. I advised him to call the Enterprise or police headquarters. It seems that he did both."

Reporters scurried away to add this new statement to their stories. Vosgle's dry lips fixed into a smile, as he placed his cigar between them. His expression showed definitely that he felt he had scored one on the reporters. He was still wearing his wise look when he turned, to see Cranston.

"Ah, Mr. Cranston!" Vosgle extended his hand. "I am surprised to see that you are still in town."

The Shadow came to his feet easily, despite the aches it caused him. He received Vosgle's clasp.

"I shall be here a while longer," he said, in the even tone of Cranston. "I hope that we may meet again, during my stay."

"We must arrange such a meeting, Mr. Cranston."

Vosgle strolled from the lobby, followed by The Shadow's steady gaze. Cranston's thin lips formed a smile that the lawyer did not see. That smile was a prophecy.

The Shadow could foresee another meeting with Rufus Vosgle; one that might directly concern the sealed box that had vanished from the scene tonight.

CHAPTER VIII. THE HIDDEN THREAT

WHEN Larry Sherrin arrived in Southbury, the next day, he was amazed when he read the newspapers. It seemed incredible that a whole city should be stirred against The Shadow; yet such was the case. The situation, to Larry, was proof of hidden menace.

THE SEALED BOX

Larry's first step was to register at a small hotel called the Southbury House, a few blocks from the center of town. It was less frequented than the Palace Hotel, where The Shadow happened to be stopping as Lamont Cranston.

From the hotel, Larry made a trip to Vosgle's office. He learned that the lawyer was out of town, but would be back later. By mid-afternoon, Vosgle had not returned. Larry decided to go out to the Whilton mansion.

When he arrived there by cab, Larry saw a large coupe parked in front of the house. It bore the initials "J. B.," which Larry identified with James Belver. When the servant, Gilbert, ushered Larry into the house, the young man found Belver there with Eunice.

To Larry's surprise, Eunice recognized him at once. Her smile was like the welcome of an old friend. Belver was cordial, also. His firm handshake made Larry feel at home.

"I thought that you had probably forgotten me," Larry said to Eunice. "It's been five years since I left Southbury."

"My uncle mentioned you often," returned Eunice. "He told me that some day you would return; and he said" the girl's tone saddened at the recollection "that if he should no longer be here, he knew that I would welcome you."

Larry's face showed a wince. The trust that Richard Whilton had shown was an inspiration. It would take Larry a long while the rest of his life, perhaps to repay it. He was glad that he had come back to Southbury. He'd find his chance to prove that Whilton was right. But he wanted to start without pretense.

"I am afraid your uncle overestimated me," declared Larry, seriously. "Actually well, I did some things that disappointed him. I've learned to be sorry for it; and I guess he knew it."

Eunice's eyes were wide. Her surprised gaze halted Larry.

"Uncle Richard could not have felt that way!" exclaimed the girl. "He believed in you, Larry. He always said he did."

Larry felt that he must make allowance for Eunice. She had been very young at the time when he had committed his embezzlement. It was natural that her uncle had kept the details from her. Belver had been Whilton's best friend, and would, therefore, know more of Larry's past. Larry turned to the reformer.

"I guess you understand," said Larry. "About what I mean when I say that I disappointed Mr. Whilton."

Belver clapped his big hand upon Larry's shoulder. His clear eyes met the young man's gaze. In his strong, firm voice, Belver summed an opinion.

"Richard Whilton trusted the right persons," he said. "His judgment increased year by year. You were young, Larry; whatever your faults, Whilton knew that you would outgrow them. His legacy to you proves his faith in your character."

The words pleased Larry; and they thrilled Eunice. She felt that Belver's statement supported all that she had said.

Looking at Eunice, Larry saw a new reason to make good. To gain and hold the trust of a girl like Eunice Whilton was worth more than any money. Larry already had the girl's confidence. He intended to retain it.

THE SEALED BOX

LEARNING that Larry had to return to Vosgle's office, Belver offered to take him downtown. As they left, Eunice invited Larry to come to dinner an invitation that he willingly accepted.

Riding downtown, Larry kept watching Belver. The big man's lips were tight; there was a firm set to his jaw. Larry wondered if Belver knew more about his past than he had mentioned. He decided to let Belver open the subject. When Belver spoke, Larry thought that he was coming to that very discussion.

"You have been away a long while, Larry," observed Belver. "Quite far from Southbury, I suppose."

"Yes," returned Larry. "I was in" he hesitated "in New Orleans, when I first read the newspaper accounts of Mr. Whilton's death."

The statement was a correct one, for Larry hadn't seen a newspaper until his plane landed in Miami.

"I said that Whilton was keen in his judgment of men," continued Belver. "I meant that, Larry, but with certain reservations. Some persons did not turn out quite as my friend Whilton expected."

Larry was sober. He felt sure that Belver referred to him. But before Larry could speak, Belver supplied words that proved Larry's guess was wrong.

"Rufus Vosgle was one," declared Belver. "When graft was rampant in this city, crime arrived in its wake. Vosgle turned his law office into a stamping ground for crooks. True, his law practice was legitimate; but it was not the sort that one might admire.

"Whilton still retained Vosgle as his attorney, simply as an inducement for Vosgle to give up his other practice. Vosgle appreciated that, later, because" Belver's eyes showed a pleased flash "when I forced graft from Southbury, criminals departed. Vosgle found himself short of clients.

"To sum it briefly, Larry, Whilton favored my campaign of reform. Vosgle was on the other side of the fence. I advise you, therefore, to be discreet in any dealings that you have with Rufus Vosgle."

Belver dropped Larry near Vosgle's office. This time, the young man found the lawyer there. Vosgle received him with a formal handshake; waved him to a chair and shoved a box of cigars across the desk. Eyeing Larry with a tilted gaze, the lawyer produced a sheaf of papers.

"Read these over," said Vosgle, briskly, "then sign them. You won't have any difficulty claiming your fifty thousand dollars. It was worth while coming back to Southbury, Sherrin."

Larry didn't like the sarcasm in the lawyer's tone. It supported Belver's claim, that the friendship between Vosgle and Whilton had lessened.

While Larry signed the papers, Vosgle watched him with a wise smile. He didn't offer to shake hands again, when he opened the door for Larry's departure. All he did was remark, dryly:

"If you need my services at any time, Sherrin, be sure to notify me promptly. I refer, of course" Vosgle's words were sarcastic "to matters regarding the Whilton estate. I don't suppose that you will require other legal advice."

LARRY found himself clenching his fists, when he reached his hotel. He had an idea what Vosgle meant. As Whilton's attorney, the lawyer knew all about that embezzlement. Vosgle probably didn't agree with Farrow, that a man could go straight after he had once done something crooked.

THE SEALED BOX

That was why Vosgle had dropped a remark that could be taken two ways. It might have been a warning for Larry to lay off future crime; or it could have been construed as an invitation to call upon Vosgle to represent him, in case Larry preferred to resume his crooked career.

Larry was so irked that he shoved past a young man who spoke to him at the elevator. It wasn't until he was in the car, that he realized the fellow had joined him. The stranger was a wiry chap, who gave Larry a friendly grin.

"My name's Burke," he announced. "Clyde Burke, of the New York Classic. I'd like an interview, Mr. Sherrin. How does it feel to come into fifty thousand dollars all of a sudden?"

"It makes you sore at some people," snapped Larry. "That includes reporters!"

Clyde followed Larry from the elevator. Unlocking the door of his room, Larry swung about.

"You heard what I said," he told Clyde. "There's no use sticking around!"

Stepping into his room, Larry gave the door a quick shove. Clyde stopped it with his foot; sidled through into the room. He gave a nudge, indicating for Larry to close the door.

Somewhat puzzled, Larry obeyed. Dusk had arrived; the room was rather dark. Larry turned on the lights; Clyde motioned for him to draw the shade. That done, the reporter handed Larry a sealed envelope.

Inside, Larry found a message written in blue-inked lines. As he finished reading it, he saw the words erase themselves one by one. That message was from The Shadow, introducing Clyde to Larry. As he crumpled the note, Larry became apologetic:

"Sorry, Burke "

"Forget it," put in Clyde. "Tell me how you've made out to-day. Who did you see?"

Larry told of his visit to the Whilton house; his talk with Eunice and his ride with Belver. He finished with a report on his interview with Vosgle.

"That's why I was sore," he added. "I was ready to take it out on the first person I met, who happened to be you, Burke."

"I don't blame you." Clyde grinned, as he transcribed Larry's statements into a coded message. "All right, old man. I'll be around when you come in this evening. If there's anything new, you can tell me."

WHEN Clyde left the Southbury House, his next destination was the Palace Hotel, where The Shadow had a room on the tenth floor, the highest story in the building.

It had been a few hours since The Shadow had given Clyde the message for Larry. Since Clyde's report was due, the reporter was in a hurry.

While Clyde was on his way to the Palace Hotel, The Shadow was already entering the room on the tenth floor.

In Cranston's leisurely fashion, The Shadow paused on the threshold. There was a light in the room; it came from a lamp on a writing desk by the window. Within the glow lay a sealed envelope. Supposing that the

THE SEALED BOX

envelope contained Clyde's report, The Shadow calmly closed the door and stepped to the writing desk. He opened the envelope and spread its message. The Shadow saw blue–inked words, penned in careful script; but the message was not coded.

Beneath its smooth velvet surface, the note carried a hidden threat:

Your efforts here have been useless. They have led the law upon a wrong trail, instead of the right one. By prompt departure, you can clear matters and avoid more trouble for yourself. Rest assured that when you are gone, prompt results will follow. Those responsible for crime are known. They will be turned over to the law.
A FRIEND.

Through its wording, the message indicated that the sender had identified Cranston as The Shadow. Couched in smug terms, it implied that its writer was on the side of justice. It was as crafty as the two–way statement that Rufus Vosgle had made to Larry Sherrin. The Shadow could take this message as he chose.

For the moment, however, The Shadow wasn't thinking of the note's import. Once scanned, those words were indelibly impressed upon his mind. They needed to be; for they would not be in sight much longer. There was something familiar about the brilliant blue ink in which the note was penned. That interested The Shadow most.

As The Shadow watched, the writing began to fade, letter by letter, although its disappearance was jerky. Half a minute later, The Shadow was staring at a blank sheet of paper.

That message, with its hidden threat, had been written with The Shadow's own brand of disappearing ink!

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW ACCEPTS

ONLY one person could have placed that message on The Shadow's writing desk. That person was the crafty master–crook against whom The Shadow warred. Coming to that immediate conclusion, The Shadow began to analyze the purposes behind it.

It was obvious the criminal wanted The Shadow out of the way. Also, the fact that the writer of the note had guessed The Shadow's identity, was proof that the man had capability.

Twice, the master–crook had turned the tables on The Shadow. This note was an indication that he could do it again with better success, since he had penetrated farther into The Shadow's affairs.

A threat was useless, without teeth.

That point was most important to The Shadow. Suppose he ignored the note entirely; did not leave town what would be the enemy's move?

The answer was obvious: Another thrust would come.

When? Where?

On the occasion that best suited the murderer. That thought flashed an instant warning signal.

The time best suited to the killer was the present. The place, this very spot where The Shadow stood.

THE SEALED BOX

There was blackness at The Shadow's elbow an open window, that faced a courtyard. Beyond was another wing of the hotel, with darkened windows on this same level. At one of those windows, the murderer was watching, to see what effect his threat had upon Lamont Cranston.

As before, the killer would prefer caution; but if he received one touch of proof that his guess of The Shadow's identity was correct, he would take the risk. It would be worth it, if the killer actually bagged The Shadow.

There wasn't a flicker on the impassive face of Cranston. Behind that calm countenance, a keen brain was working swiftly. The Shadow knew that one false move would mean doom. The hidden killer unquestionably had a gun trained on this window.

The Shadow couldn't beat him to the shot. Those windows in the other wing were blotted by darkness. A quick draw of a gun would be offset by the total absence of a target.

Doing nothing would be as bad a move as any. The murderer was probably itchy with his trigger. If he thought that Cranston was stalling, he would take it for granted that he was The Shadow.

COOLLY, The Shadow seated himself at the writing desk. In absent-minded fashion, he reached for his fountain pen. It wasn't in his vest pocket. That gave him a quick recollection. He had left it in the drawer of the writing desk. That explained the fact that the murderer's message had been in disappearing ink.

The vanishing ink never showed its peculiar behavior until after it had dried. The criminal had simply found Cranston's pen and had used it, without knowing that he was preparing a real surprise for The Shadow.

There, again, the facts clicked. If the murderer had realized that the ink was tricky, he wouldn't still be holding doubt as to Cranston's identity.

Instead of opening the desk drawer, The Shadow reached for an ordinary pen that was on the writing desk. Dipping it into an inkwell, he began to write on hotel stationery. He was taking the chance that the lurking marksman would bide his time, thinking that Cranston intended to leave some reply to the message.

The ruse worked long enough for The Shadow to finish a short note and seal it in an envelope. After that, the itchy watcher saw Cranston act in most natural fashion.

Rising from the desk, the tall hotel guest began to pack a bag. Not once did he move from the framed area of the lighted window. Nor did he glance toward the window itself. His actions were those of a man who was both perplexed and worried.

The situation, though, had reached a hair-trigger pitch. Once he saw Cranston start to move out of range, the murderer might cut loose. The one safe policy was to keep him guessing, boldly and deliberately. With it, The Shadow must prepare a counterstroke of his own.

He had it.

Halfway finished with his packing, The Shadow picked up a handy timetable and held it to the light. He glanced at his watch; raised it to his ear. Lifting the telephone, The Shadow put in a call to the lobby desk. His voice was Cranston's quiet tone:

"Is Mr. Burke downstairs? The reporter?"

THE SEALED BOX

The clerk hadn't seen Mr. Burke.

"If he comes in," was Cranston's request, "tell him to call me."

Hanging up, The Shadow set his watch. Apparently, he had called the desk to ask for the right time. The killer certainly thought so; for there was no sudden gunfire from across the courtyard.

Minutes passed, with Cranston engaged in his methodical packing. The next train wasn't due for an hour, and the lurking killer probably knew it. Hence there was no reason for Cranston to hurry. Much depended, though, on how soon Clyde's call came.

Five minutes. The telephone bell jangled. This was the real test; The Shadow met it. He appeared to be too busy to answer the call, until the bell rang a second time. That was just the right policy to lull the man who had him covered from ambush.

Clyde was on the wire. He heard The Shadow's low-voiced instructions. It was lucky that the would-be assassin saw only Cranston, not Clyde.

DOWN in the lobby, Clyde came out of the telephone booth, breathless. He hurried to the checkroom; asked for a bag by number, saying that it was for Mr. Cranston. The attendant didn't want to give it to him. Clyde snatched the satchel and pointed to the clerk.

"Ask him," said Clyde. "He'll tell you Mr. Cranston wants me to bring the bag up to him."

Riding to the tenth floor, Clyde left the elevator and slid for a side corridor. There, he opened the bag. From it, he brought a cloak, a slouch hat and a pair of gloves. They were reserve garments that The Shadow always carried; but this time, it wasn't Cranston who was going to wear them.

It was Clyde's job to impersonate The Shadow, in a daring ruse to trick the murderer. If it worked, the result would be more than a rescue. The crook would forget his theory that Cranston and The Shadow were one person.

Sneaking to the far wing, Clyde pulled the slouch hat to eye level and tightened the cloak about him. He began to try the room doors one by one, hoping that the murderer had left a door unlocked. The Shadow had figured that the killer would have a free door ready for prompt departure.

There was a give to the third door that Clyde tested. He didn't waste time with it. Shoving the door inward, Clyde drove through.

The light that came from the hall gave him a view of a man crouched at the window, a leveled rifle to his shoulder. Past the aiming killer, Clyde saw a lighted window at an angle across the courtyard. Framed in that glow was the figure of Cranston, his hands clamping the fastenings of a suitcase.

Clyde's sudden entry alarmed the killer sufficiently to make him forget Cranston for the moment. Sight of the figure in the doorway caused the killer to drop Cranston entirely. The killer took Clyde for The Shadow.

Springing to his feet, the crook swung his rifle for the supposed Shadow. Before he could use the weapon, Clyde was upon him, fighting for the weapon's possession. The wiry reporter gained a hold and kept it. He couldn't see his antagonist's face in the darkness, but he knew that the crook was desperate.

THE SEALED BOX

The best that Clyde could do was hang on. Cranston was gone from that other window. It wouldn't be more than half a minute before The Shadow was here, to take over the battle himself.

Those thirty seconds proved too long for Clyde. He had forced the rifle up above the killer's head; sliding one hand free, he tried to collar the crook's throat.

Lessened pressure served the killer. His hands drove the rifle butt downward. It thumped Clyde above the ear.

Amid a head-splitting splash of fireworks, Clyde had instinct enough to roll away. Before attempting aim in the darkness, Clyde's foe shot a look through the window and saw that Cranston had disappeared. With a long bound, the murderer took a different route than the hallway. He sprang through a connecting doorway into another room.

The Shadow arrived to hear the door slam. It was locked from the other side, before The Shadow could reach it. Dashing back into the hall, The Shadow came to an end passage that was blocked by a big door. Beyond, he heard the rumble of a descending elevator.

The murderer had reached a closed-off passage that had a service elevator. He was on his way to safety.

RETURNING along the hall, The Shadow met Clyde. Half groggy, the reporter was taking off the hat and cloak. The Shadow's whisper voiced thanks along with approval.

Clyde steadied, and walked back to the regular elevator. There, The Shadow told him to take a stroll down to the Enterprise office. Before he left, Clyde passed over Larry Sherrin's report.

On the way to the newspaper office, Clyde met other reporters, who were headed for a chat with James Belver. They found Belver in his private office, finishing an editorial for the next day's newspaper.

Clyde read it along with the other reporters, and it pleased him. With the hunt for The Shadow at a standstill, Belver was advising that the police search for the missing sealed box, instead of looking for an unknown being in black.

The conference ended before train time. Clyde took a taxi to the depot. As he neared the station, he saw another cab stop there. Out stepped Cranston, to hand over a load of luggage to a station porter.

Clyde was going to get out and contact his chief, when he saw something that made him stop. Staying in the cab, he told the driver to wait.

Coming from the station was another person that Clyde recognized: Rufus Vosgle. The lawyer stopped to greet Cranston.

"What a coincidence," remarked Vosgle, dryly. "I come to the station to make reservations for a future trip and I meet you again, Mr. Cranston."

Vosgle stared at the luggage. His tone was surprised, when he questioned, "What? Leaving us so soon?"

"Yes," replied Cranston, his tone indifferent. "Things were too quiet here. I have decided to sail from New York to-morrow, on the Normandie. From Europe, I shall probably start for Africa, on another of my big-game-hunting expeditions."

THE SEALED BOX

Clyde decided to communicate with Cranston later. Rather than be seen by Vosgle, the reporter ordered the taxi driver to take him back to the hotel. On the way, Clyde summed a few details regarding Cranston's coming trip. The Shadow had mentioned them during those brief minutes at the hotel elevator.

A supercrook had given The Shadow terms that amounted to an order, to leave Southbury. Though he had also sought to assassinate The Shadow, the crook would be satisfied if the terms were followed. He wanted to be rid of The Shadow, dead or alive.

The Shadow had presumably accepted the terms. Thereby, he was giving the criminal opportunity for new moves. They would be directed toward an easier prey than Lamont Cranston. The Shadow knew the person that the plotter would choose as dupe.

That person was Larry Sherrin. Larry's return to Southbury looked opportune for the murderer, because The Shadow had so arranged it. By letting Larry be the bait, The Shadow could return in secret; to hide his own moves against his master-foe.

By apparently conceding defeat, The Shadow had cleared the path to future victory.

CHAPTER X. VOSGLE'S VISITOR

THE days following The Shadow's departure were quiet in Southbury. Excitement had simmered down to speculation. The police still wanted The Shadow; but even Chief Mulley admitted that a capture of the cloaked stranger might produce a quiz, rather than a murder charge.

The sealed box was the prize at stake. It could explain why The Shadow had been active. A hidden grafter wanted that box; and perhaps he hadn't gained it. Some crook might have muscled in to grab the box; his purpose: to sell it to the grafter at a healthy price.

James Belver supported that theory, on the basis that Richard Whilton had proclaimed The Shadow as a friend. As for Rufus Vosgle, he said nothing. The lawyer's policy was to avoid discussions of unsolved crime. He never knew who might need his legal advice, later.

To Larry Sherrin, the lull was welcome. He had become a regular visitor to the Whilton mansion, at Eunice's request. At intervals, Larry saw Clyde Burke. On one occasion, the reporter pointed out an item in the newspaper, which stated that Lamont Cranston, a recent visitor in Southbury, had sailed on the *Normandie*.

That news meant nothing to Larry, for he couldn't remember that he had ever met Cranston. There was a man in Southbury, however, to whom it meant much. That person was the supercrook who had sent the ultimatum to The Shadow.

The quick-clicking strategy at the Palace Hotel was something that the supercrook had seen through, after it was over. He knew that it wasn't The Shadow who had bobbed into the room where he lay in ambush. He had been outguessed, that was all; Cranston was actually The Shadow. (Note: See "The Shadow Unmasks." Vol. XXII, No. 5.).

But The Shadow had apparently tired of a losing fight in Southbury. Three tight pinches, on three successive nights, should be enough for any meddler.

What the murderer did not know was that another guest was due at the Palace Hotel to-night. An explorer named Kent Allard had wired the hotel to reserve a room there.

THE SEALED BOX

Though no one had ever guessed it, Kent Allard was actually The Shadow. The guise of Cranston was one that he merely adopted for certain occasions.

DUSK settled early on this particular day, for the sky was thick with threatening clouds. Rufus Vosgle observed the gathering darkness when he left his office, and it seemed to please him. Stepping into an old-fashioned limousine, the lawyer ordered the chauffeur to drive home.

Soon, the big car pulled up at a suburban house that matched the Whilton mansion as a show place.

Stolid-faced servants admitted the lawyer. Vosgle went up to the second floor and entered a corner room. The room was equipped as an office, almost in duplicate of the one that the lawyer used downtown.

Vosgle seated himself at a heavy desk; gazed with satisfaction at a bulky safe in the corner. Finally, he lighted a cigar and puffed in deliberate fashion.

Vosgle conducted business in his office, as well as the one downtown. Certain clients came here to see him, and one was due at present. Soon, the signal of a buzzer announced the visitor. Vosgle pressed a button twice, signifying that the person was to come upstairs.

The visitor who entered Vosgle's office was a woman. She was a pronounced blonde, whose hair showed traces of peroxide treatments. She was tall, graceful, but in a posing way. Her face was a curious mingle of beauty and hardness.

Under proper light, her well-applied make-up could give her features a real charm; but the glow of Vosgle's office wasn't the sort she liked. It revealed too many of the hard lines in her facial contour.

Vosgle's visitor was Theda Morenz, the torch singer who starred at the Cairo Club.

The blonde took a chair at the side of the desk, because the light was milder there. She saw Vosgle's box of cigars and helped herself to a perfecto. She lighted the cigar, blew a long curl of smoke. In a contralto drawl, Theda remarked:

"Nice cigars you hand out, counselor. What are you going to do, run for mayor or something? Is that why you wanted to see me?" Theda paused; her gray eyes narrowed; she added: "There's a lot of votes I could line up for you."

"There is no occasion for humor," returned Vosgle, crisply. "I am not interested in politics. I sent for you to find out if Police Chief Mulley has bothered any of the crowd at the Cairo Club."

"Why should he?" drawled Theda. "Every crook in town had an alibi the night that Whilton was croaked" again her gray eyes hardened "except you."

If Theda expected that jab to worry Vosgle, she missed her guess. It brought a smile to the lawyer's dryish lips.

"A good joke, Theda," commented Vosgle, "but don't spring it during the floor show at the Cairo Club. Some people might not appreciate it."

"I guess not. Maybe they'd begin to wonder where you were between ten and eleven o'clock that night. Funny, wasn't it, you showing up at the Cairo Club just after eleven."

THE SEALED BOX

Vosgle eyed the woman steadily, as he stroked his chin. He considered his next words carefully, before he spoke them.

"I TOLD you that some one telephoned me about half past ten," said Vosgle. "It was a tip that the police chief was at the Cairo Club. That's why I went there to see that he did not overstep his authority. Of course, when I learned that there had been trouble at Whilton's, I did not stay at the Cairo Club."

Theda nodded. She remembered that. She thought of something else that might annoy Vosgle.

"A telephone call," remarked Theda. "That reminds me; you told the newshounds that somebody called you here, the night when the cops had The Shadow boxed at the Central Building. You said your call was like the one that Belver got, and the police chief.

"Only, you weren't home that evening, to get it. Because I knew you wanted to see me, and I was buzzing this line all evening. Only the flunkies answered. Say, counselor, what was the idea of handing that hokum to the newspapers?"

Vosgle's smile grew wider.

"You've answered it yourself, Theda," he returned. "I could not have given any good explanation of my whereabouts on the night of Whilton's death. Fortunately, I was not asked for one. On the next night, when I heard there had been trouble, I decided to spike questions by giving an answer beforehand.

"The reporters wanted a statement, so I told them what they could say. Most of the things they print are wrong, anyway. Another erroneous bit of news did not matter. It was just a bit of policy on my part."

Theda watched Vosgle lean back in his chair. She didn't believe that the lawyer had received either of the calls the one he claimed, or the one he actually denied. He was a smart bird, Vosgle. Smart enough to have a better reason for calling her here than the mere routine of learning how things were at the Cairo Club.

Theda waited for the reason. Vosgle knew why she was silent. He waited until he felt that her curiosity was at its best pitch. Then, Vosgle spoke:

"I saw an old friend of yours the other day."

Theda came up in her chair, choking over a puff of cigar smoke. Her question was a snarl:

"Larry Sherrin? Is that who you mean?"

"Yes," replied Vosgle. "I don't suppose he has seen you since he returned to Southbury?"

"He hasn't!" Theda's words were bitter. "He's gone soft, I guess, while he's been away; or yellow. He was out for the big money, when I used to know him. Having fifty grand handed to him has made him high hat.

"Say" Theda's tone showed perplexity "how do you explain Whilton leaving Larry that dough? Wasn't the old geezer wise that Larry was the guy who gypped him, five years back? Or had Larry been in touch with him, handing him some smooth-soap story?"

Vosgle shook his head. For once, Theda was willing to agree that the lawyer was actually puzzled.

THE SEALED BOX

"RICHARD WHILTON did not approve of my defending criminals," declared Vosgle. "On that account, he ceased to confide in me. He was impressed by self-styled champions of right, like James Belver. It became easy for people to prey upon Whilton's friendship and sympathy."

Theda's eyes had an eager flash.

"You mean guys like Larry?" she quizzed. "You think he kidded Whilton? Made the old man fall for some racket?"

"That is what I want you to find out, from Larry."

Theda chucked her cigar in an ash stand. She arose and faced an oval mirror. Assuming a willowy pose, she admired her own reflection. Her eyes met Vosgle's gaze in the mirror.

"Larry's making a play for that Whilton dame," scoffed Theda. "That's because she's got dough. She'll lose her hold when I show up. A brunette, huh? Well, Larry's a boob for blondes and me, in particular."

Swinging to meet Vosgle's direct gaze, Theda added, in a harsh tone:

"Larry took a run-out on me, five years ago. That means I've chucked him, see? But I'll hand the old sob stuff or some other line that will make him fall. You want the goods on him. You'll get it! Only" Theda snapped the final words "what's it worth to you?"

Vosgle indicated the safe.

"You owe me a thousand dollars," he reminded, "from the time I defended you on the blackmail charge. I still hold your promissory note. I shall return it when you give me a report on Larry Sherrin."

"It's worth more than that to put the skids under him "

"Not at all," interrupted Vosgle. "I want actual facts, whether favorable or otherwise. Let me know" Vosgle thwacked the desk with a hand stroke that surprised Theda by its power "whether Larry Sherrin has played straight or crooked. You have heard my offer for such information. You may take it or leave it!" Theda's grimace showed that she had only one choice. Vosgle held her note; and he was capable of collecting debts. Theda gave a shrug.

"All right. I'll get the dope for you."

Vosgle's eyes narrowed with suspicion, as if he thought that Theda intended to fake her information. He was prompt to spike any such prospect.

"When you arrange to meet Larry," he ordered, crisply, "let me know when and where. I might drop by to see you."

THERE was a shrewd expression on Vosgle's face when Theda had gone. Vosgle was confident that he had driven a smart bargain. He might have considered otherwise, had he been able to view the interior of Theda's sedan and heard the conversation that passed between its occupants.

The blond torch singer hadn't come here alone. She had left three tough-faced rowdies in her car, the worst batch of hoodlums who used the Cairo Club as their hangout. In her harsh drawl, Theda was telling her gang all that had passed at Vosgle's.

THE SEALED BOX

"The cheap skate!" was her verdict. "He knows I've got the goods on him. I saw him out at the Cairo Club, the night he bumped old Whilton. If I'd only figured then" Theda was vicious "that he was after an alibi, I'd have made him talk turkey right then!"

"Why didn't you call for a showdown to-night?" voiced the thug at the wheel.

"Because he don't need me now," snapped Theda. "He knows he's out of the woods. Nobody's going to prove anything on Vosgle. The old gazebo almost had me thinking he didn't croak Whilton."

There were growls from the gang. A back seat hoodlum muttered something about "ten grand going flooey" indicating that Theda had expected to shake ten thousand dollars from Vosgle's coffers in return for an alibi. It was Theda who silenced the discontent.

"Quit the squawk," she ordered. "We've still got a chance for that much dough; maybe double. And Vosgle" Theda chuckled "is the guy that's fixed it for me."

The thugs wanted to know how. Theda told them.

"I'll shake it out of Larry Sherrin," she declared. "Either way, he's licked. If he's gone straight, he won't want people to know he was crooked once. If he's trying to trim that Whilton dame, he'll have to slip us a cut or we'll tip her off.

"The only guy that could help him out is Vosgle, and that's spiked. Because" Theda's harsh voice was triumphant "Vosgle is letting me handle Larry! The dough's in the bag, boys!"

Theda's tone promised that trouble would be prompt for Larry Sherrin. Trouble that no one could help him to avoid.

Like others in Southbury, Theda Morenz supposed that The Shadow would be absent in the future.

CHAPTER XI. LARRY LISTENS

LARRY SHERRIN had just finished dinner with Eunice Whilton, when Gilbert announced that some one wished to speak to him on the telephone. He was unprepared for the surprise that came to him across the wire.

The drawly voice that Larry heard had the poison of a snake's bite, though the words were friendly:

"Hello, big boy! Where have you been? Didn't anybody tell you I was still around?"

Larry hesitated, chewing his lips. The telephone was a long way from the dining room. He decided to reply, since Eunice couldn't overhear.

"Hello, Theda," he said. "Yes, I did hear that you were out at the Cairo Club. Only "

"Only you've gone high hat?" Theda's voice was velvety; no accusation in it, just a well-faked reproach. "Well, money makes people forget old friends. Good luck to you, Larry. Only" Theda's drawl turned wistful "I'd like to give you a handshake with it."

"I don't think I can get out to the Cairo Club "

THE SEALED BOX

Larry's stall was exactly what Theda wanted. Her tone took on a sympathetic touch.

"I know that, Larry. That's why I'm downtown. I'll be right across the street from the High Spot Cafe."

"But I can't get there, Theda. Sorry."

Theda objected; this time, with a sting.

"Maybe you've forgotten things from five years back, Larry; but some people haven't. That's what I want to talk to you about. I'll wait just half an hour."

Larry hung up the receiver and went back to the dining room. He couldn't hide his troubled air from Eunice. The girl's eyes were questioning. Larry tried to change his expression to one of annoyance.

"Just another reporter," he told Eunice. "Those chaps are a nuisance. Suppose I run downtown a little while. I'll drop back, later."

Eunice worried when Larry had gone. She didn't want to pry into his affairs; but she did feel that he should have mentioned more details. When Gilbert came into the dining room, she asked:

"Did the reporter give his name?"

"What reporter, Miss Eunice?"

"The one who just called on the telephone."

Gilbert paused, with a trayload of dishes. Bluntly, he stated:

"It was a lady who called, Miss Eunice."

Jealousy was something new to Eunice. So new, that she didn't realize what caused her emotion. With sudden determination, she went from the dining room. She saw a cape lying on a chair; that gave her the next idea.

Throwing the cape over her shoulders, Eunice hurried out to the garage to get her coupe.

LARRY, meanwhile, was riding downtown in a car that he had bought the day before. His thoughts were as mingled as Eunice's, but with different cause. He didn't want to talk to Theda; didn't want to be seen with her. But he knew the trouble she could cause.

Nearing town, Larry thought of Clyde Burke. He wondered where the reporter was. There were lights in the office of the Daily Enterprise. Maybe Clyde was up there. Larry parked near the building and went up to see.

When he stepped from the elevator, he ran squarely into Clyde, with two other reporters. Before Larry could say "hello," Clyde gave him a warning look. Larry looked for an excuse for being on hand.

He saw an office that bore Belver's name and mumbled something about an appointment there. As he started toward the office, Belver came out.

"Hello, Larry!" greeted Belver. "Where did you drop from?"

THE SEALED BOX

"I was calling on Eunice," replied Larry. "She well, she thought I ought to stop in and see you. I guess she'd like to have you call this evening."

"I should be glad to. Are you going back there, Larry?"

Larry nodded. Belver introduced him to the reporters. All went down to the street together. Larry found an excuse to head for the High Spot Cafe, without mentioning his destination. Once around a corner, he stepped into a doorway and waited.

Soon, Clyde joined him. Larry told what had happened. Clyde gave prompt advice regarding Theda.

"Better see her," he told Larry. "I'll watch where you go. I'll be on deck."

Clyde let Larry go ahead. Half a block farther on, Larry found Theda waiting near a lighted store front. As usual, she had picked a spot where the glow suited her looks. Larry couldn't see that she had changed in five years, and Theda knew it, from the surprise that he registered.

Theda gave her old alluring smile. She thought it worked; but she was wrong. Somehow, Larry's vision had improved; he saw deeper than in the past. He wanted to be through with Theda, in a hurry. She mistook the look he gave her.

"Don't worry," she told Larry, smoothly. "The police aren't after me. But it would be better if we talked somewhere by ourselves."

"All right," said Larry. "Where do you suggest?"

Theda indicated the High Spot Cafe. She pointed out a side door. Larry nodded. They crossed the street together, with Theda tucking her elbow over Larry's hand in chummy fashion.

Theda stumbled on the curb. Larry caught her; she brought her face close to his with a smile of thanks, that invited a kiss that Larry didn't give. He returned a smile, though, that gave Theda future promise. That seemed the best way out.

THE lights of the cafe gave the occupant of a passing coupe a perfect view. The occupant was Eunice. Looking back, Eunice saw Larry hurry Theda into the side door of the restaurant.

As she circled the block, Eunice didn't care what happened. She had been to the Cairo Club for dinner parties and she knew who Theda was. Eunice was swept by a sudden feeling of helplessness.

She cared for Larry much more than she knew; with him, she had always been herself. To see him plucked away by some one worldly wise made everything turn red before her eyes; except the traffic lights. They were red already; Eunice didn't notice them.

She found herself halted in a jam of cars, with a beefy-faced cop hurling sarcasm from the street. He was taking her number; threatening a ticket.

Eunice didn't even hear him; she was in a daze. Her rescue came when a big man hopped from a car and came over to the coupe. Anxiously, he shook the girl's shoulder.

"Eunice! What is the matter?" Eunice recognized James Belver, and gave a grateful choke. He roused her into driving the coupe to the curb. He fixed the trouble with the traffic cop; shooed away a crowd and came back

THE SEALED BOX

to see her. His question was kindly, and it reached the source of trouble. "Is it about Larry?"

Eunice nodded; then asked, amazedly: "How did you know it?"

"Larry stopped at the office," replied Belver. "He had something on his mind. I could see it. You didn't quarrel with him?"

With a headshake, Eunice decided to tell the trouble. She explained about the telephone call; Larry's subsequent meeting with Theda. At mention of Theda, Belver's eyes flashed angrily.

"You had better drive home," he told Eunice. "I shall see Larry! If that woman is the sort of friend he prefers to you "

"Don't tell him that I saw him!"

"I shall be the one to see him. I shall explain that there are different social circles in Southbury; ones that do not mix. Don't worry, Eunice" Belver's tone became fatherly. "There may be some reason, some excuse. Let me handle it."

It was Belver's intention to reach the High Spot Cafe as soon as possible; but he wasn't the first person who carried that idea. Clyde Burke had already entered the side door of the little restaurant.

He saw a flight of stairs, with a telephone booth at the bottom. Larry and Theda had gone up; but Theda was coming down again.

Clyde ducked past the stairs; he watched Theda go into the telephone booth. She didn't close the door tight; Clyde could hear the call she made. A servant must have answered, for she asked for Mr. Vosgle. To the lawyer, she voiced:

"I've got hold of Larry at the High Spot Cafe. Lay off, though. I think he wants to talk... Sure, you can check up if you want to, but stick down near the corner. You'll see us come out, in half an hour..."

Theda went upstairs again. Clyde followed. He saw the closed door of a tiny private dining room. He listened; he made out Larry's voice and Theda's, but the words were not easy to catch. Clyde stepped away, trying to figure some better way to listen in. He heard footsteps on the stairs.

Clyde started out in a strolling manner. At the head of the stairs, he ran into a squint-eyed rowdy of blocky build. The scowl the fellow gave didn't improve his unshaved face.

"What're you doing here, lug?" challenged the thug. "This upstairs is private! Get it?"

"I'm just finding it out," retorted Clyde. "Where do ordinary people like myself get fed?"

"Down on the first floor."

"I see. Well, you belong in the basement!"

Along with that hint, Clyde swung a quick hook for the thug's jaw and landed. Clyde had spotted the fellow's hand in his right coat pocket, where a gun muzzle gave its telltale bulge.

THE SEALED BOX

The thug went somersaulting to the bottom of the stairs, with Clyde bounding after him. If that rowdy was on his way to put slugs into Larry Sherrin, his intention was ended when he hit the floor below. Clyde didn't need to be on hand. The fellow had sprawled unconscious.

It was lucky, though, that Clyde had dashed downward. In from the door lunged another pair of huskies, brought by the clatter of their pal's fall. They saw Clyde and tried to slug him with drawn revolvers; but the wiry reporter dodged the strokes.

He tripped one thug; wrenched free from the other.

Clyde's objective was the corner. He hoped to lead the attackers in that direction, to get them away from Larry. They changed their minds about pursuit. Clyde reached his goal unmolested. Hat gone, coat awry, he looked about.

An approaching man recognized him. It was James Belver, again a timely arrival.

Breathless, Clyde told what had happened, without mentioning Theda. He spoke of Larry, though.

"The fellow you introduced to me down at your office, Mr. Sherrin – he went in there. When I was going past a bunch tried to gang me –"

"Wait here, Burke."

With long strides, Belver hurried past the corner, waving his arms as he went. Clyde waited, tense. Fists clenched, he was ready to start for the doorway again, when a hand clamped him from the darkness. A whispered voice sounded in Clyde's ear.

It was The Shadow!

BACK in Southbury, Clyde's cloaked chief picked the spot where new trouble lay. It took Clyde only a dozen seconds to explain what had happened. He felt The Shadow start forward from the pitch-blackness of the building wall.

Then, from the next block came the shrill wail of a police car's siren, announcing aid that Belver had obtained. That shriek carried to the doorway where thugs guarded Theda's confab with Larry. The Shadow paused as the two downstairs hoodlums hurried out, dragging their groggy pal between them.

The trio reached a parked sedan; packed into it and drove away just as the police car arrived. Bluecoats leaped out to investigate the doorway where crooks no longer lurked.

The Shadow gave brief instructions to Clyde. The reporter was to remain, and learn what followed.

When another car slued around the corner five seconds later, its lights swung at an angle that revealed the wall where Clyde stood. With a quick glance, Clyde looked for The Shadow. He saw nothing but the blank wall.

Keeping his presence still unknown, The Shadow had disappeared in further darkness.

CHAPTER XII. LARRY FINDS TROUBLE

THEDA thought that her game was working with Larry. During the ten minutes spent in that upstairs dining

THE SEALED BOX

room, she had begun to discuss the past. Not with open threat; but with subtle, friendly pretense, of which Theda was quite capable.

She had chosen the best light in the room; her reddened lips showed to perfection. So did the sparkle of her gray eyes. Theda's drawl was indolent; her pose dreamy. All that she needed was the soft music of an orchestra to complete her act.

"So it's all ended, Larry," toned Theda. "I haven't forgotten five years ago, though." Her hand crept across the table toward Larry's; her voice finished with a sigh: "I couldn't forget. Ever!"

Larry was noncommittal. Theda was confident that the build-up had worked. "There was a lot we talked about in those days." Theda's lips showed a regretful smile. "What we were going to do, when you were in the money "

"I was in the money," reminded Larry, the instant that Theda paused. "You saw that you grabbed your share of it. I was only able to repay Mr. Whilton half of the fifty thousand that I took."

Theda looked incredulous for the moment; then, her smooth pretense returned. Her hand reached Larry's; it rested there.

"Clever boy, Larry," complimented Theda. "You covered it by making Whilton think that you had reclaimed half the stolen cash. You passed over twenty-five grand; so he left you twice that, in his will "

"You've got it wrong, Theda "

"Wait, Larry. Twenty-five and fifty that's seventy-five. I've taken twenty-five, so you take the same. That leaves us another twenty-five, to split."

Larry was on his feet, starting toward the door. He turned to drive home his final words.

"I paid my debt to Whilton," declared Larry. "The money he left me has no strings to it. Your game won't work, Theda!"

"Fifty-fifty was our bargain "

"And we finished it! If you think you can shake me down for twelve and a half thousand dollars, you're on the wrong track!"

Theda's pretense ended. She was tigerish, as she sprang toward the door. Her long-nailed finger tips dug deep into Larry's arm. Her hiss was a vicious threat.

"Listen, sap," she snarled. "You can't shove me around, on that Whilton dame's account! Not without paying for it! I'll get more than twelve five, before I've finished. I'll snag half of that fifty grand that's come your way maybe all of it!"

Larry thrust Theda to one side. He yanked the door open, without observing the blonde's hard smile. There was a surprise waiting for Larry, thought Theda. She had posted the thugs to make sure he, Larry, didn't walk out before she was through with him.

The surprise that came was one for Theda, too.

THE SEALED BOX

THERE were footsteps on the stairs. Some one had heard the door yank open. A cop's voice bellowed:

"Who's up there?"

Theda's claws reached Larry's shoulder.

"You snitcher!" she hissed. "So you squawked to the bulls! Told them to come here to pinch me! Just a smart guy "

Larry clapped his hand to Theda's contorted mouth.

"Show some sense," he whispered. For the first time, he was using the hard, calculating tone that Theda remembered from those days of crime. "I don't want the cops to find me talking with you. How do we get out of here?"

Theda pointed to a door at the rear of the hall. Larry nodded; started her in that direction. He was about to follow when a policeman reached the head of the stairs. Quick in the pinch, Larry saw his chance to cover Theda's flight, since they both could not get away in time. Larry stepped straight toward the cop.

"What's the matter, officer?"

"That's what I'm asking you," retorted the bluecoat. "We got orders to arrest some guys that started a brawl. You're under arrest! Who else is up here?"

"Look around," suggested Larry. "Find out for yourself."

Hauling Larry with him, the cop searched the tiny dining rooms. More officers arrived and joined in the hunt. They reached the door that Theda had taken; finding it locked, they decided it was unimportant. Theda had locked the door from the other side, before she hurried down the back stairs.

With Larry as their only prisoner, the police went down to the street. There they were met by Clyde Burke, who protested that they had made a mistake. Clyde argued that Larry was the man that the police had been called to protect.

"I was the person who ran into trouble," explained Clyde. "A bunch tried to gang me in the doorway. I knew Sherrin was upstairs "

"So you were in it, huh?" quizzed a policeman. "Yeah, you look like you'd been in a brawl. You're under arrest, too!"

Clyde produced a reporter's card. It didn't help. He and Larry were marched toward the corner, where a patrol wagon had arrived. With a grin, Clyde told Larry that they might as well make the best of it, to which Larry agreed.

BEFORE they were shoved aboard the black Maria, a car pulled up. Rufus Vosgle stepped from it. At sight of the lawyer, the policemen waited. Vosgle provided a dry smile when he recognized Larry and Clyde. He asked why the two were under arrest.

One cop explained, while another silenced the prisoners. Vosgle motioned the officers aside. With thumbs tucked in the armholes of his vest, the lawyer spoke to Larry and Clyde:

THE SEALED BOX

"Let them take you down to headquarters," said Vosgle. "I'll be there before they have you slated. Chat with Chief Mulley until I arrive. Ten or fifteen minutes will be all. You won't even see the inside of a cell."

Cops muttered growls at Vosgle's assurance. Coldly, the lawyer looked them over, nodding as if taking careful note of their faces. The grumbles stopped; the officers became uneasy. They watched the lawyer step into his car and drive away.

It wasn't good policy to trifle with Vosgle, and the policemen knew it. They gawked until the car had turned the corner; then decided to proceed with what they considered to be duty. Again, they were interrupted, when another car arrived. This time, it was James Belver who sprang out.

Asking for the details, Belver received them. He looked pleased when he learned that Larry was the only person upstairs at the High Spot Cafe. He assured the officers that Clyde's story was correct; that Larry was the innocent cause of the alarm. When Belver added that he, personally, had called the police on Clyde's say-so, the cops were convinced.

They doubted, though, whether they could release the prisoners without official order. Belver settled that.

"Where are you stopping?" he asked Larry. "At the Palace Hotel?"

Larry replied that he was staying at the Southbury House.

"I'll tell Chief Mulley that you are there," decided Belver. "As for you, Burke, you can stop in my office later and talk to him there. That settles it, officers, I am responsible for these men."

One minute later, the patrol wagon was rolling away unoccupied, leaving Clyde and Larry on the sidewalk, shaking hands with Belver. When the newspaper owner learned that Rufus Vosgle was on his way to headquarters, he chuckled.

"So Vosgle would like to be there to spring you," laughed Belver. "That's one of his specialties, bulldozing the police into releasing prisoners. This time, Vosgle will have a surprise. He will learn that tact is better than shrewdness."

Larry started for his hotel, a few blocks away; while Belver drove back to the Enterprise office, to call Chief Mulley.

Clyde started to saunter away; he hadn't gone far before a low, penetrating whisper halted him. It came from a vacated taxi; the driver was in a lunch room getting coffee.

Clyde boarded the cab, to find himself with The Shadow. After Clyde reported, The Shadow ordered:

"Go to the Southbury House. Be with Larry when the police chief comes to question him."

As Clyde started to step from the taxi, the driver saw him from the lunch room window and came hopping out; in hope of a fare. The Shadow drew Clyde back into the cab. When the hackie arrived, Clyde leaned from the window and told him to drive to the Southbury House.

LARRY, meanwhile, had reached the hotel on foot. He had walked rapidly, as he often did. That was something that Larry was to regret, later. He thought that he had finished with trouble for a while; instead, he was heading into it deeper.

THE SEALED BOX

Trouble of a sort that The Shadow foresaw; but which even The Shadow did not expect so soon.

Larry's room was on the third floor of the old Southbury House; near the back. As he paused to unlock his door, he failed to notice the rear of the hall. There, a door stood ajar. It was the door of a small room that offered access to a fire escape, which, in turn, led down to a space behind the building.

Entering his room, Larry closed the door but did not lock it. He decided that would be better, in case the police chief happened to call. Groping through the darkness, Larry reached a table lamp and turned it on. The window was just beyond; Larry opened it, because the room was stuffy.

A slight sound made Larry listen. It came like a creep outside his door, followed by whispers. Larry went to the door and listened. The sounds were not repeated. He credited them to his imagination. Lots of stray thoughts had been bothering Larry this evening. Turning toward the center of the lighted room, Larry started to take off his coat and vest. He halted, with his vest unbuttoned, outspread in his hands. Larry's smile faded as his eyes fixed upon a chair that was faced toward him.

There, Larry saw an object that he recognized instantly, though he had never seen it before. It was a flattish box of glossy, black metal, clamped with wires that were joined in a seal of thick, crimson wax upon the center of the lid.

"The sealed box!"

The thought flashed to Larry's brain; the words came low, but audible, from his lips. With that utterance, Larry was gripped by a sickening sensation. His confidence of a moment before was completely shattered.

That sealed box had brought death to Richard Whilton. It had nearly produced disaster for The Shadow. Tonight, the reappearance of the sealed box, threatened ruin for Larry Sherrin.

Some unseen foe, the master-plotter who had murdered Richard Whilton, had placed the sealed box here, without The Shadow's knowledge!

CHAPTER XIII. FRENZIED MINUTES

THROUGH Larry's numbed brain drilled the thought that he was framed. A master-criminal had picked him to bear the brunt of crime. Of all persons in Southbury, Larry could least afford to be found with the sealed box in his possession.

Whoever held this box was wanted for the murder of Richard Whilton!

It didn't occur to Larry that The Shadow had expected this; that The Shadow was keeping close watch for that very reason. Even at this moment, Clyde Burke was on his way up to see Larry. The Shadow had provided for the emergency that might occur before Police Chief Mulley arrived.

Larry didn't know that; but he acted as The Shadow had known he would. Larry steadied; as his reason returned, he decided that his best course was to contact Clyde Burke as soon as possible.

At that moment, an ominous sound interrupted Larry's gathering thoughts. A cautious rap came from the door of the room. Larry shot a look toward the window. A half story below was the roof of a low-built garage, that came flush with the wall of the hotel.

THE SEALED BOX

There was too much light along that roof; too many windows opening toward it. It wouldn't do to chuck the sealed box from the window. The clatter would be heard; the box would be observed.

The knock came again; still cautious, but more rapid. It certainly wasn't Mulley. The police chief wouldn't rap that way. It struck Larry that it might be Clyde. That would be luck!

Larry started toward the door; with quick afterthought, he decided to play safe regarding the box. Whipping off his coat and vest, Larry laid them on the chair, completely covering the box.

When he opened the door, Larry was glad that he had taken the precaution. He came face to face with Theda; and the blonde wasn't alone. She had her gang with her; or, rather, the pick of the available thugs in Southbury. Larry met the same trio that had tried to bully Clyde; but this time, they were already prepared for action. Larry saw the glisten of three revolver muzzles.

LARRY gave up his idea of shoving the door in Theda's face. With mock courtesy, he remarked:

"Hello, Theda! Why don't you introduce your friends?"

"Not a chance," drawled Theda, harshly. "I just wanted you to know they were around. Stay outside, boys, while I talk to the lug. We're going to finish our business proposition!"

Theda entered the room and closed the door. She plucked out the key and tossed it into a wastebasket by the window. Larry wouldn't have a chance to lock the door in a hurry.

"I guess you were on the level about not calling the cops," said Theda, steadily. "I saw them shoving you into the wagon. That's why I figured I'd give you another chance to take my proposition. We came up by the fire escape, just to be around when you showed up here."

"Thoughtful of you," returned Larry. The more he talked to Theda, the more he despised himself for ever having liked her. "But you're wasting your time. I gave you my answer."

"The boys didn't like it." Theda nudged toward the door. "They've got a say in it, you know."

That worried Larry. He was ready to stage a fight, even with the odds against him; but not with the sealed box in this room. Larry decided to mollify Theda; to make her think that he might come to terms.

Before he could speak, there was a rap at the door. Theda gave a sharp "Yeah?" and one of the thugs responded.

"A guy just got off the elevator," the hoodlum growled through the door. "He must have lamped us, for he ducked down the stairs. He looked like that reporter guy."

Theda swung to Larry.

"Was that bird coming up here?"

"I didn't expect him," returned Larry. "But I was just going to tell you that Chief Mulley is due. He wants to quiz me about that brawl. Listen, Theda" Larry became serious "we can't talk here. You get over to the Cairo Club. I'll come there, later."

THE SEALED BOX

Theda never liked any one to hurry her. She liked to show her independence in a brazen, irritating way. She had cleared out of the High Spot Cafe at Larry's urge, and that fact still peeved her. Again, she realized that departure was wise; but she thought she had time to show Larry where he stood.

"Don't we sit down?" questioned Theda. "You used to be a polite guy, Larry. I thought you'd been running around in big society. What do you do when you see that Whilton dame? Let her scramble for a chair herself?"

Larry started to the corner for a chair. As he turned away, Theda gave an impatient snarl. Stepping to the closer chair, she snatched up Larry's coat and vest. Flinging the garments on the bed, she snapped:

"Don't waste your effort! This chair will do "

THE abrupt finish of Theda's tone told Larry what had happened. Swinging, he saw Theda staring at the black box. The bulge of her eyes proved that with all her crookedness, Theda had not had anything to do with planting that box in Larry's room.

Theda was speechless, until her eyes met Larry's. Her gaze hardened; her lips curled into an ugly smile.

"So that's the racket!" Theda's harsh tone was low. "You sure played old man Whilton for a sap! You didn't stop at getting him to leave you a sock of dough. You found out that he had this box.

"It was you that croaked him, so you could snatch the box. All you need is to find the guy that wants it, and make him cough over plenty. Well, I've got an idea who he is" Theda's eyes narrowed at thought of Vosgle "but I figured he'd staged the whole job himself.

"Say" another idea struck Theda "maybe that's why he sicked me on you! He could have been smart enough he is smart enough to know what you were up to "

Larry's quick move halted Theda. With a long, jumpy stride, Larry reached the chair and gathered up the box. His gaze was as hard as Theda's; his free hand was coming for her throat with spread fingers that seemed ready to choke her.

Theda did a dive for the door; she managed to yank it open before Larry could overtake her. Hoarsely, she croaked for aid; a pair of thugs came surging through. The third was already hustling up from a spot farther along the hall, panting the news:

"The bulls! They're coming up Mulley and a couple of dicks! I seen them from the window!"

Theda pointed him into the room where the other two were milling with Larry. Wheeling away, Larry had slung the box to the bed. He had grabbed up the chair to beat off the slashing strokes of gun-laden fists.

The third thug pitched into the fray. Taking Larry from three directions, they yanked the chair away from him.

Theda's screech of triumph faded as a wiry arrival bowled her inward from the doorway. It was Clyde; The Shadow had instructed him to come here.

Clyde snagged a clogged gun that was driving for Larry's head. That blow stopped, he jabbed his own fist for a thug's eye.

THE SEALED BOX

Clyde and Larry could have evened that struggle, if Theda hadn't come into it. Gunless, the tough blonde grabbed up the sealed box as a weapon. With both hands, she bludgeoned the back of Larry's head. It was the flat bottom of the box that whacked him, but the blow was hard enough to slump him.

As Larry sagged numbly, Theda thrust the box into his feebly closing hands.

The thugs, relieved of Larry, were shoving Clyde against the wall. One of them was poising his gun for a downward slug to Clyde's skull. Theda's harsh voice supplied a merciless command to hurry:

"Give it! Sock the guy! We want him lying cold when the cops find the box on Larry!"

As the thug's fist started downward, there was a tongue of flame from the open window, accompanied by a report that was thunderlike in that closed room. The slugging fist writhed in the air; the revolver flopped from its loosened fingers. With a howl, the thug grabbed his wounded wrist.

A fierce laugh proclaimed the author of that timely shot. The mirth chilled Theda and the two remaining toughs. They turned toward the window, ugly horror on their faces. There, from blackness, they saw the burn of avenging eyes, above the muzzle of a smoking automatic. Below the gun was a gloved fist that clung to the window ledge. The Shadow had found his own route to this room of battle. He had saved Clyde from doom. His next deed would be to free Larry from the stigma of planted evidence.

The Shadow had come to claim the sealed box.

CHAPTER XIV. THE LAW'S ERROR

ONE shot was all The Shadow fired. No more were necessary. Two thugs lost their nerve before they could aim. Though they were three paces apart, each thought The Shadow had him covered. Neither liked the look of that tunnel-mouthed .45, nor the brilliant eyes above it.

Even Theda, at another angle, was deceived by the illusion of The Shadow's gaze and aim. She thought that the burning eyes were boring through her; that she was to be the next target for a withering blast.

Theda headed for the door; and with the clatter of her flight, the thugs followed. Their crippled pal went with them, last of the bunch, he looked back to see The Shadow coming over the window sill.

The Shadow pursued as far as the hall, in case they tried to rally. He heard them pounding down the fire escape. With weird effectiveness, The Shadow delivered a mocking laugh; the sort that would speed them farther. Those attackers were welcome to go their way, for the present.

Clyde reached The Shadow. He managed to gulp the news that he had heard a thug shout that Chief Mulley and headquarters men were on their way up to see Larry. That word given, Clyde pointed into the room. For the first time, since his arrival, The Shadow saw the sealed box.

Larry had it, gripped to his chest. Half groggy, he was trying to rise, not knowing what it was that he clutched.

Before The Shadow could move into the room, there was noise from the elevator. Mulley and his detectives sprang into view. They had heard The Shadow's shot; for the elevator shaft was an open one.

They saw The Shadow, with the automatic in his fist.

THE SEALED BOX

In that dilemma, The Shadow produced a sudden plan. He had to cover the fact that Clyde was in his service; that he was protecting Larry. With The Shadow's own status still in doubt, it wouldn't help either Clyde or Larry if the law learned the connection. Before Clyde could realize what was coming, The Shadow made a clutch for him.

Grappling with the reporter, The Shadow hissed quick words. Before Clyde had a chance to nod his understanding, his chief whirled him out into the hall. Faking a blow for Clyde's head, The Shadow gave him a straight-arm shove. Letting himself ride, Clyde took a headlong dive into the arms of Mulley and the dicks.

The Shadow sprang into Larry's room. His free hand took the sealed box from Larry's grasp; with the same sweep, The Shadow shoved the box out of sight beneath his cloak. Larry was still so dazed that he was losing his balance. The Shadow hauled him to his feet.

Chief Mulley, first past the door, saw another blow from The Shadow's gun hand. He didn't note that it skimmed short of Larry's head, to thump The Shadow's own wrist, behind the young man's neck.

The blow looked like a real one; for when The Shadow released his hold, Larry was off balance. Larry's collapse was perfect, he was so dizzy he didn't have to fake it.

Mulley's revolver was out. The police chief was aiming across Larry, for a shot at The Shadow. With a rasped laugh, The Shadow faded; made a sudden gun-thrust at Mulley. The police chief ducked behind the bed. The dicks saw his scramble as they entered. They dropped back.

That interlude was all The Shadow needed. He vaulted the wide window sill, for a perfect drop to the garage roof, eight feet below.

THE SHADOW had relieved Larry of a desperate burden: the sealed box. In doing so, The Shadow had again brought the law along his trail. This time, his case was to become a desperate one.

The garage roof was a bad beginning; for The Shadow was visible upon it, when the police chief and the detectives reached the window.

Striding for a house wall opposite, The Shadow spun about to deliver timely shots. With unerring aim, he picked the window sash, only a few inches above the police chief's head. One bullet shattered the glass. Mulley and the detectives dropped. The next bullet whistled through the space where they had been. They stayed low.

When the police chief ventured another peek, The Shadow had scaled the end house of a row. He was conspicuous against the glow of evening lights as he started across the roofs. Mulley and the detectives opened fire. Their bullets peppered wide at that long range.

Clyde had Larry on his feet. The staccato rattle of the gunfire was rousing Larry. He muttered something about the box. Clyde silenced him. Close to Larry's ear, Clyde poured the important facts.

"The Shadow took the box. You're to forget it understand? As for what happened here, there were some tough guys you don't know who; after that, The Shadow. He pitched into us, too."

Larry began to understand. Looking toward the window, Clyde saw the police chief straining toward the darkened house roofs. The reporter nudged Larry; then whispered:

"Don't worry about The Shadow. He's in the clear."

THE SEALED BOX

It looked that way, from the darkness above the house tops. The Shadow had reached a central spot where gloom enshrouded him. But events were to disprove Clyde's statement. Disaster was brewing for The Shadow.

Police on the street had heard the shooting from the window. They had recognized the police chief, and had glimpsed The Shadow. They were surrounding the block; and had found a way to reach the house tops.

There was a fire station near at hand. The police commandeered a scaling ladder.

Shifting along the irregular roofs, The Shadow came to a barrier. It was a long, high picket fence that separated two roofs in the block. He had to get by it, to arrive at a house wall that the police had not yet reached. The only way to pass was to scale the pickets.

The Shadow started a quick climb. It shoved his head and shoulders into view, just as policemen arrived at the front edge of a roof. There was a shout; the cops opened a stinging fire.

That hail of bullets was as direct a barrage as The Shadow had ever received in the open. There wasn't a chance to fade until he had cleared the pickets, and the bullets were piercing his cloak.

It wasn't exactly luck that saved The Shadow. It was the notoriously bad marksmanship of the Southbury police. The jerks they gave the triggers were disastrous to their aim. Not a bullet clipped The Shadow.

THE pack let out a yell when they saw The Shadow tumble from the picket fence. They stopped shooting, only to gawk, bewildered, when he came to his feet again. They bounded for the fence, clicking emptied guns as they ran. The barrier stopped them.

The Shadow had staged that fall to rip his cloak loose from a picket. Within twenty feet of the fence, where the officers clambered like monkeys in a cage, The Shadow eased himself over the rear edge of a roof, ready for a downward trip. One cop with a reloaded gun shoved his arm between the pickets and fired at that short range. His bullets didn't even chip the cornice that The Shadow gripped.

All that The Shadow wanted was a toe-hold on a window shutter just below. To reach it, he shifted his weight to the next stone of the cornice. That brought the calamity that the police bullets were unable to produce.

The stone seemed tight until The Shadow gave it pressure. The instant that it took his full weight; the stone proved loose.

The Shadow's clutch literally tugged the stone from the roof. A gloved hand made a sideward stab for the solid stone that it had previously held. Fingers clutched; but the toppling block struck The Shadow's swaying shoulder.

Fingers slipping, The Shadow started a fall. His hands made a slicy grab for the shutter on the wall and caught it. The Shadow deserved the reward of safety, in return for his amazing effort. He had actually snatched himself from the air, to seize that swinging shutter that his foot kicked out to where his hands could reach it as they passed. The shutter, itself, was huge and sturdy; capable of supporting The Shadow's sudden weight. The rusted iron hinges were the part that couldn't take the strain.

Those hinges snapped. The Shadow volplaned downward, hanging to the shutter as he took the dive. It was two stories to the space at the rear of the house, with cement at the bottom. The Shadow landed there with a terrific crash, that shattered the wooden buffer to which he clung.

THE SEALED BOX

He had flipped completely over during the plunge. That turn alone preserved The Shadow's life. The shutter took the shivering impact, to lessen The Shadow's jolt. Nevertheless, the smash left him motionless on the cement.

Shouts across the low garage roof told the police chief what had happened. He ordered men to hurry and capture The Shadow. Leading the detectives, Mulley rushed from Larry's room, to get down to the street. Clyde beckoned for Larry to follow. On the way, Larry pointed to the fire escape. They hurried down that way.

They reached the space behind the row of houses ahead of the police chief. Officers were already on hand, however. Clyde and Larry gained temporary hope when they found that the way was blocked. There was a fence between the rear yards, also, with pickets as high as those along the roof.

Chief Mulley came up, bawling orders. He never noticed Clyde and Larry. He shouted for flashlights; officers produced them. The beams centered on the space beyond the picket fence. The light showed the remnants of the ruined shutter; nothing else.

EVEN Clyde was amazed at sight of that vacancy. Long seconds passed before it dawned on him that fully five minutes had gone by before the police had reached this spot. In that time, The Shadow must have roused himself to crawl away. The barring fence was giving him more minutes to continue such a course.

There were awed mutters from the cops. Still unwilling to admit their poor marksmanship, they swore that they had fired bullets through The Shadow without harming him. Here was the proof of it. The Shadow ought to be lying dead beside that shutter. Instead, he had vanished as completely as if the cement had opened to swallow him.

He wasn't human, The Shadow; he was a ghost!

Chief Mulley heard the comments; he roared for silence.

"Search every cellar every alley! Find The Shadow, dead or alive!" Officers floundered as they tried to scale the picket fence. Others boosted them over. Some took the long way around to the backs of the buildings. With the search under way, the police chief strode out toward the side street. Clyde and Larry went along with him.

When they reached the hotel, they found James Belver. He had come up from the Enterprise office. He heard the story that Clyde and Larry had told. Chief Mulley repeated it; Belver looked to them for corroboration. Once given, that story could not be changed.

"It was The Shadow," declared Clyde, sticking grimly to his chief's orders. "He was in the room when I got there. I battled with him at the door; he went out by the window instead."

"It wasn't only The Shadow," testified Larry, hoping to soften matters. "There were some rowdies who barged in on me, first. The Shadow chased them out to the fire escape. But afterward" Larry's own words cut him like a knife "The Shadow slugged me when I tried to hold him."

Belver's face was grim when he heard that testimony. He turned to the police chief.

"I owe you an apology," declared Belver. "I classed The Shadow as a friend of Whilton's. I argued that your hunt for him was a mistake. I considered him crime's foe, not its supporter. Tonight has changed all that."

THE SEALED BOX

"On the word of such reliable men as these" Belver, indicated Clyde and Larry "I can only brand The Shadow as a menace. You must find him, Chief Mulley, and arrest him for the murder of Richard Whilton! I hope" Belver added the words with emphasis "that when you do capture The Shadow, you will be able to prove his guilt!"

Those words brought strained glances between Clyde and Larry. Their own hopes had reached the lowest depth. By following The Shadow's own order, they had lost the support of the one man to whom they thought they might appeal for help. They, themselves, had given James Belver cause to denounce The Shadow.

Both Clyde and Larry knew that The Shadow must be crippled. They could foresee no other prospect than his capture. Worst of all, they knew that when the law did find The Shadow, it would gain the very sort of evidence that Belver had mentioned.

Rather than leave a trail, The Shadow would cling to the sealed box. Whoever discovered The Shadow would find the sealed box with him.

CHAPTER XV. STRANGE RESCUE

THE SHADOW'S plight was as desperate as Clyde supposed it. Off in the darkness beyond that row of houses, he was evading capture through almost blind instinct. Sheer will power was all that kept The Shadow on the move.

Blood dyed the black cloak that hung, half ripped, from The Shadow's shoulders. His left arm hung limp; the fingers of its hand were numbed. His right knee gave every time he attempted a step. The Shadow's only mode of locomotion was an angled, crablike crawl.

There was no chance for him to slip the police cordon. His only hope was to merge with spots of darkness, where he could remain unseen.

The Shadow had started from the spot beside the picket fence with no thought of a destination. He had dragged himself along a line of darkened steps at the backs of houses, fighting ahead despite the knifing pains that came with every motion.

When he finally paused, it was only because his groping hand found a temporary hiding place.

Forcing his good arm beneath a grating, The Shadow levered it upward. He tumbled through into a space beside a cellar window. He lay there, his head ringing, his whole body racked by aches.

Footsteps clanged the grating above The Shadow's head. He heard that clatter dimly, like a detached sound from far away. Knifing pains were an opiate, that threatened to coax The Shadow into a long stupor.

Recollection of the grating's clatter was all that kept The Shadow conscious. His ears heard a voice, barely audible, though it was just above his head. It was a policeman who gruffed:

"Don't look like there's anybody around here!"

The footsteps faded from the grating. The Shadow hadn't noticed the dim flashlight that the officer flicked downward. In his turn, the cop hadn't seen The Shadow. The flashlight, fortunately, needed a better battery.

Despite the cop's departure, The Shadow sensed the need to move onward. His brain had cleared enough to

THE SEALED BOX

tell him that when the police failed to find him, they would search this ground again.

Fighting the sharp stabs that came when he moved, The Shadow forced his way out from the hiding place. Getting that light grating up again took all the strength he had; although a boy could have lifted it with one hand.

CRAWLING aimlessly at first, The Shadow began to guide himself away from approaching footsteps and glimmering lights. With a tedious drag, he reached a passage between two rear buildings, just as two policemen came tramping through the space that he had left.

More lights were approaching him; groping toward the wall, The Shadow flattened behind a stack of ashcans.

Three officers arrived. One paused to search near where The Shadow lay. The others growled for him to come along.

"We've been through here before. We gotta get back to give a report to Chief Mulley."

The trio left without completing the search. The Shadow heard another comment:

"The orders are to spread out; then close in again."

The Shadow didn't like that prospect. He wouldn't be so lucky, later. With every pause in his new crawl, he could feel the weight of the sealed box. Out from his hiding place, The Shadow was trying desperately to reach the next street.

The Shadow's wits were clearer; but his hurts seemed worse. Blood blurred his vision; his good arm was beginning to pain him, so much that it sagged occasionally. When he neared the sidewalk of the back street, he slumped short. Lying there, The Shadow began to ease off into a drowsy stupor that furnished contentment.

There were more footsteps. Police were coming along the street, flashing their lights into parked cars. Busy with that task, they did not turn in The Shadow's direction. Their action, though, roused The Shadow; gave him a pressing idea.

If he could reach one of those cars, he would have a good hiding place for a while. Until the police closed in with another search. If only he could pick an automobile that would be gone when they returned!

A man came along the street. The policemen paused to watch him from a distance. The fellow stepped into a coupe and drove away, without a challenge. The Shadow regretted that he hadn't slipped into its rumble seat. He realized, though, that he could not have managed the climb.

All the cars close by were sedans. Wiping his eyes, The Shadow took another look. He saw a car that was vaguely familiar. It took half a minute to place it; then the answer came with a rush.

That car was the two-door sedan that the thugs had boarded when they fled from the High Spot Cafe!

Thoughts clicked. That car belonged to Theda Morenz. She wouldn't leave it here any longer than she could help. What was more: if Theda – or any of the thugs found The Shadow in that car, they wouldn't shout about it.

The Shadow didn't try to reason what they might do. His thoughts were painfully slow in their procession. One idea drummed through his head. That car offered a chance to escape this present situation, wherein the

THE SEALED BOX

police would eventually come across him.

WITH gathered effort, The Shadow dragged himself across the darkened pavement. He flopped on the sedan's step; thrust his hand upward to the door handle. The car was tilted slightly toward the curb. Through sheer inertia, The Shadow brought the door open.

Dragging himself into the sedan was tougher; but The Shadow managed it. A pull squeezed him past the folding front seat. Sprawled on the rear floor, he reached for the door. A final effort; it came shut, even though it did not latch tightly.

There was a rumble as another car departed. Police were letting people through to get their machines, watching them from the end of the block. Three minutes passed; quick footsteps arrived at the sedan and stopped there. The Shadow heard voices, Theda's and that of a thug who accompanied her.

"I told you the coppers wouldn't lamp us close," undertoned Theda, to her companion. "With only two of us coming for the bus, it looks all jake."

Theda shoved the thug aboard, with a curt order to hurry it. She followed; as she shoved back the folding seat beside the driver, Theda happened to see into the rear of the car.

Her breath hissed, as she clutched the thug's arm:

"Look! The Shadow!"

The pair stared at the sprawled shape in black. From that mass, they could see an upturned face that no one would have recognized, even from previous sight, for it was grimy and blood-streaked.

Eyelids closed, The Shadow appeared to have lapsed into the senselessness that his strained nerves had sought so long. That was a sham. Actually, The Shadow was straining to keep alert. His hand, buried in his cloak, gripped an automatic.

If Theda or the thug decided to finish The Shadow at this moment, they would find that he still had enough life for a few last trigger-tugs.

Satisfied that The Shadow was out to stay, Theda's eyes went to the seat beyond him. There was a blackish glister there. Theda made out the sealed box. She voiced the news to the man beside her.

"Better chuck it," suggested the thug. "Heave the box out, along with The Shadow."

"And have the bulls on us?" demanded Theda. "Not a chance! Get this buggy going. We're starting through."

HARD jounces panged The Shadow, as the car jarred forward from the curb. The driver was jittery; but Theda's cool drawl steadied him. They didn't excite enough suspicion for the police to halt them. Once past the cordon, The Shadow heard the thug say:

"We can head for that ravine out past the Cairo Club. A sock on the konk will finish the guy. The bulls will find him, with the box on him – only it won't be for a long while."

"Yeah?" Theda snarled. "Well, I'm telling you the coppers won't be finding The Shadow at all!"

The thug was puzzled. Theda ordered him to slow the sedan on a secluded street.

THE SEALED BOX

"Vosgle wants dope on Larry, don't he?" said Theda. "And it's worth a grand to me if he gets it. All right we've got the dope. We found Larry with the sealed box. We had to leave the box with him because Chief Mulley was coming up. But The Shadow snatched the box away from Larry.

"Nobody knows that but us. Vosgle would think I was kidding him, if I handed him that yarn. But he won't think so, when I hand him the box – and The Shadow along with it!"

Theda shot a glance toward the rear seat. There was no stir there. She was contemptuous, as she added:

"Maybe that black buzzard's still got some life in him. If he has, so much the better. He'll be meat for Vosgle. I'm telling you, Vosgle can make anybody talk even The Shadow!"

The thuggish driver decided that Theda wanted to go to Vosgle's house. He headed the car in that direction; as they rode, Theda kept up a running line of chatter.

"The set-up's simple," she declared. "Whilton had the box; Larry found it out and bumped the old geezer to get it. He wanted to hock the box to the big-shot; and that means Vosgle. The Shadow muscled in and got the box.

"We wanted big dough from Vosgle. This is where we get it. It's worth it, him getting the sealed box and The Shadow, too. It lets us out of plenty of trouble. Vosgle can get rid of the box and The Shadow, both."

Theda's next comment concerned the amount that she expected to coax from Vosgle. She decided to start with a price of fifty thousand dollars, coming down to twenty-five thousand; but no lower. Those calculations were not heard by The Shadow.

Once his ears had caught Theda's assurance that he was being taken to Vosgle, The Shadow had let his strained nerves and muscles relax. Theda was right, when she said that Vosgle would try to make the prisoner talk. The Shadow knew that he would receive the best of treatment at Vosgle's, for a while at least.

There would be rest; a chance to recuperate. After that, Vosgle would be around, to quiz The Shadow on various propositions, including Larry. Vosgle was shrewd; he was a bargainer. There might be ways to deal with Vosgle.

Quietly, The Shadow lapsed into a coma. His oblivion was complete when the sedan pulled up in front of Vosgle's heavy-walled home.

LEAVING The Shadow in the thug's custody, Theda rang for entrance. She found Vosgle in his upstairs office, attired in dressing gown.

He doubted her story when he heard it. He thought that Theda was spinning a yarn to cover the botch that she had made of her first interview with Larry.

Vosgle said that he had come directly home from police headquarters, after learning that Larry and Clyde had been released in Belver's responsibility. He decided to call headquarters, to learn if The Shadow had actually been seen again. As Vosgle dialed the number, Theda told him:

"You'll find out that I'm right. Only, they won't tell you that The Shadow snapped the sealed box from Larry Sherrin. That's something the coppers don't know."

THE SEALED BOX

Two minutes' chat with police was all that Vosgle required. He called a couple of servants; told them to come along with him to Theda's car. There, they found The Shadow and carried him indoors. Vosgle followed, clutching the sealed box, with Theda at his elbow.

"If you're going to put the heat on that lug" the woman indicated The Shadow, stretched inert upon a sofa "you'd better call in a croaker. A right one. Get me?"

Vosgle smiled. He understood underworld slang.

"I shall quiz The Shadow to-morrow," he promised. "I have a physician who can be trusted. What is more, I can assure you that The Shadow will remain here. No one leaves this house unless I choose."

As an afterthought, Vosgle added:

"Other people leave here when I deem it wise. You had better go, Theda. You are due back at the Cairo Club."

Theda pointed to the sealed box, tucked under Vosgle's arm.

"What about the box?" she demanded. "I'm not handing it to you for a gift. It's got a price and a high one!"

With a mock bow, Vosgle extended the box to Theda, suggesting that she take it with her. Theda shied as if the box contained a live electric wire.

"Keep it here," she snapped. "I can't afford to be caught with it. I can trust you with it, counselor. We'll talk terms to-morrow."

"That will be satisfactory. I shall regard the box as your property, placed in my custody."

Vosgle walked to the door with Theda. She recalled, with satisfaction, that the lawyer had never double-crossed any crook who was his client. Moreover, she liked the glint in Vosgle's eagle eye; the hard smile upon his pointed features.

The sealed box would be safe with Vosgle. So would The Shadow. But Theda's idea of The Shadow's safety wasn't the sort that would have pleased the prisoner, had he been conscious enough to consider it.

Strange rescue had plucked The Shadow from the closing toils of the law, to place him deep within the stone-walled fortress where Rufus Vosgle ruled.

CHAPTER XVI. VOSGLE GIVES ADVICE

DAY dawned on a finish of another futile search for The Shadow. That was bright news for Larry and Clyde. They thought that The Shadow had made a perfect get-away; they no longer regretted that they had kept to the instructions that he gave them.

By afternoon, however, their enthusiasm had waned. Clyde had received no word from The Shadow. That made the situation glum. It indicated that ill could have reached their cloaked rescuer. All that Clyde could do was advise Larry to sit tight.

At five o'clock, Larry received a telephone call from Eunice. She was trying to conceal some emotion as she talked over the wire. Her call was simply an invitation for Larry to come to dinner, since he had been unable

THE SEALED BOX

to return to the house the night before. But behind it, Larry sensed that Eunice knew he had met Theda.

Larry found a chance to meet Clyde and ask if he could tell the truth to Eunice. That was a tough question for Clyde to answer. He decided that since The Shadow had given no instructions to the contrary, Larry was free to speak.

Gratefully, Larry assured Clyde that he would exact a promise of strict secrecy from Eunice.

Both Clyde and Larry intended to avoid Theda Morenz; more trouble with her henchmen would be bad policy at this time. They would have changed that intention, had they guessed that Theda could lead them to The Shadow.

Right after dusk, Theda started a trip that would have been an excellent trail to follow.

Driving alone, she reached Vosgle's house. The servant who admitted her pointed to a door at the rear of the hall.

"Mr. Vosgle is downstairs, Miss Morenz. You will find him there." Theda took a stairway to the cellar. Another servant met her; she saw the bulge of a revolver on the fellow's hip. He led her to the end of a passage; rapped at a heavy door.

Vosgle opened it from the other side, beckoned Theda into a stone-walled room.

There, propped beneath a glaring light, was The Shadow. His features were those of Kent Allard; thin, long, hawkish in profile. But Theda couldn't see much of that face. The Shadow's head was swathed in bandages that came over one eye. His cheek had a large, crisscrossed patch; his chin a small one.

The Shadow's left arm was in a sling; his right leg extended straight across a chair in front of the one where he inclined. His head was tilted back wearily; his eyes were listless. Vosgle saw a look of ugly pleasure register on Theda's face. The lawyer smiled.

"Our patient is comfortable," remarked Vosgle, "but not talkative. However, I have tried to make him feel at home."

Vosgle pointed to a corner where The Shadow's hat and cloak were hanging over a chair. Theda looked around the room. The door was stout enough, particularly with one of Vosgle's men on duty outside. She eyed heavy gratings that barred windows located high in the walls of the low-ceilinged room.

"Those look tight enough," approved Theda. "You've got to watch The Shadow close. They say he's slippery."

"He slipped too far last night," commented Vosgle. "He crippled himself too much to try his old acrobatics. Don't worry, Theda. He can't break loose from here."

VOSGLE stepped toward The Shadow, to deliver the raspy question:

"Is there anything you want to say?"

The Shadow ignored the query. His stare was dopey. Theda decided that Vosgle's physician must have given The Shadow a narcotic. That made it all the better. She nodded her approval to Vosgle. The lawyer suggested that they go up to his office.

THE SEALED BOX

As soon as they arrived there, Theda started to talk.

"About the box," she announced. "I figure it's worth fifty grand."

Vosgle showed a look of injured surprise. He shook his head. Theda thought a few moments; then offered to take forty thousand. Another negative shake from Vosgle.

"Thirty-five," began Theda. "That's the lowest "

"Why waste time?" queried Vosgle. "We made a bargain. Let us keep to it. I regard the sealed box as evidence against Larry Sherrin, that is all."

"You mean all you're offering is to return that promissory note?"

"Correct!" Vosgle pushed a box of long, thin cigars across the desk. "Try a panatela, Theda. They are a milder smoke than a big cigar."

Theda came to her feet; swept the cigar box from the desk with a vicious sweep of the hand. While cigars were scattering, she snarled at Vosgle:

"So you're a dirty double-crosser after all "

Vosgle's hard tone stopped her short. Pointing Theda to a chair, the lawyer strode angrily to his safe. He looked over his shoulder, to see Theda watching him.

"No more of that talk, Theda," ordered the lawyer. "You'll apologize for what you said!"

Suppressed rage was evident in Vosgle's manner. His fingers were impatient with the safe dial. He muttered to himself; then carefully began to turn the knob.

Theda took sudden interest. She could see every move of the lawyer's hand, past his shoulder.

"Three to the right then five to the left "

Theda was clocking off the combination. When the safe came open, she was whispering the entire string of figures to herself. Vosgle was digging deep into the safe. Reaching for paper and pencil on the desk, Theda quickly wrote down the combination and tucked it into the neck of her dress.

Vosgle came from the safe bringing the sealed box. With it, he had Theda's promissory note. He laid both right beside the memo pad which Theda had used to write the combination. Pointing, Vosgle remarked:

"Your choice, Theda the sealed box or your note. Which do you take?"

Theda arose impatiently. Kicking cigars from her path, she walked toward the door. She stopped there, with her hand upon the knob.

"I apologize for what I said," declared Theda. "You wouldn't double-cross me. But you'd gyp me" her tone was harsh "and that's something you won't get away with! You want that sealed box, Vosgle, and you know it! Take it for twenty-five grand."

Vosgle shook his head. Theda began to turn the door knob. Vosgle indicated the box and the note.

THE SEALED BOX

"You want me to keep both of these?"

"Sure," nodded Theda. "Put them back in the safe. I'll give you a while to think it over. My offer stands until ten o'clock to-night. If you don't come through by that time, I squawk to the bulls!"

"That's your privilege, Theda," mocked Vosgle, as he locked the safe. "Think it over, though, before you do."

THEDA was alert when she went downstairs. She was looking around with a professional interest. She noted that the ground floor was not as impregnable as it looked from the front. There was a sun porch that lay behind Vosgle's living-room; an easy enough place to enter.

A guy with nerve enough could come in here and get to Vosgle's safe; not to take the sealed box, but to bring out that promissory note that Vosgle held to insure Theda's good behavior. If that happened to be missing, there wasn't much Vosgle could do about it.

When she reached her car, however, Theda had a better idea. The note was only for a thousand dollars. She ought to be able to borrow that much without trouble. Yes, she'd raise it before ten o'clock; if Vosgle didn't phone her, she'd phone him. He would have to return the note for the money. That would clear the way to fresh terms regarding the value of the sealed box.

Theda took a backward glance toward the house, as she drove away. She noted a stretch of lawn just in front of the living-room windows. There, long streaks of blackness stretched like ghostly figures. One blotch seemed to move, as though it represented a living form.

Slowing the sedan, Theda squinted at the blackened patch. It was motionless again. She decided that it was nothing more than a shady streak caused by a tree.

There was a whisper, though, that troubled Theda's ears. It sounded like a distant, fading laugh tinged with mockery an echo of the recent past.

The Shadow's laugh!

Theda's thick-rouged lips scoffed unpleasant words as she stepped on the accelerator. It couldn't be The Shadow. She had seen the strong-barred windows that held him. He was crippled, too. The Shadow would stay put where he was, for a long time to come.

BACK at the house, Vosgle was strumming at his desk, pleased with the way he had handled Theda's demand for big money. Snapping from his reverie, the lawyer picked up the telephone. He dialed a number, asked a few tart questions of the person who answered. Hanging up, Vosgle displayed new satisfaction.

Coming from his desk, he chuckled as he stooped to reclaim a pocketful of cigars from the floor. He went downstairs; ordered his big car. He paced the hallway, smoking one of the cigars, until the limousine arrived from the garage.

When he rode along the driveway, Vosgle was untroubled by the shadowy shapes that lined the lawn. He didn't note the blackish streak that Theda had seen; but it wouldn't have bothered him if he had. Vosgle didn't feel jittery when he thought about The Shadow.

Soon, the limousine neared the Whilton mansion. Vosgle noted two cars outside the old house. One was Larry's, which Vosgle expected would be there. The other machine was Belver's; the lawyer knew that he would see it.

THE SEALED BOX

The telephone call that he had made was to the Enterprise office. They had told him that James Belver had just left to visit Eunice Whilton.

Gilbert admitted Vosgle. The servant was surprised to see the lawyer; for Vosgle had seldom called at the mansion in recent years. Looking toward the living room, Vosgle saw Larry talking with Belver. Eunice had not yet come downstairs to join them.

Belver's clear eyes flashed when they saw Vosgle. Stopping his conversation with Larry, Belver demanded, abruptly:

"What brings you here, Vosgle?"

"Business," returned the lawyer, "with a client. By the way, Belver, I want to congratulate you. Last night, you outdid me. While I was waiting at headquarters, you saw to it that Sherrin and Burke were released by the police. Excellent work!"

Turning to Larry, Vosgle added:

"My business is with you. It is of a personal, as well as a legal, nature. I think that it will be all right for Mr. Belver to hear it."

Belver's eyes were blazing. They showed his distrust of Vosgle. Belver was cool, though, in his retort:

"Since my presence may be valuable to Larry, I shall hear what you have to say, Vosgle."

"LAST night" Vosgle was speaking directly to Larry "you kept an appointment with a woman named Theda Morenz. Perhaps you have not mentioned that fact publicly. If persons question you on the matter, you may refer then to me. I was responsible for the entire matter."

Vosgle looked toward the stairs. He saw Eunice, attired in an evening gown and wearing beautiful jewels.

Eunice had heard the conversation. It was too late for her to retreat. Standing on the stairs, she listened.

"Miss Morenz told me that she once knew you," resumed Vosgle, facing Larry. "She said that she wanted to see you; that there were certain matters that you should have mentioned to me. I suggested that she tell you so. I felt that perhaps you did not have full confidence in me.

"I can assure you that I did not suggest that Miss Morenz cause the trouble that she did. I had no idea that she intended to have rowdies accompany her. So I owe you an apology, Mr. Sherrin."

Vosgle's tone was frank. Larry could do no more than nod his acceptance of the apology.

"I knew that you would understand," acknowledged Vosgle. "In return, I have advice to offer. If Theda Morenz indicated that she wanted money from you, ignore it. Should she bother you again, inform me."

Larry started to express his thanks. Vosgle interrupted.

"The woman called me to-day," added the lawyer. "She indicated that she had acquired some property that belonged to you; or, as she put it, something that you would pay plenty to get back. Whatever it was, she valued it at twenty-five thousand dollars."

THE SEALED BOX

Larry's thoughts shot to the sealed box. Theda had seen it in his room somehow, she had regained it from The Shadow. Larry was speechless. He scarcely heard Vosgle's last comment:

"She wanted me to urge you to settle, Sherrin. Otherwise, she might sell to a higher bidder. I told her I would call by telephone, before ten o'clock "

"Never mind." Larry's smile showed that he was thinking quickly. "I'm not interested in anything Miss Morenz has to offer."

Vosgle seemed pleased. He remarked that he was leaving town on the night train, but would be back the next afternoon. Larry could see him then. The lawyer shook hands with Larry; gave a nod to Belver. He did not glance toward Eunice, when he strode out through the front door.

His back turned toward those who watched him, Vosgle indulged in a cunning smile. Again, he had given advice of a certain sort. He was confident that he had scored with an attentive listener.

The sealed box was concerned in the attorney's game. He could afford bold moves. Rufus Vosgle was positive that he would receive no opposition from The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII. AT THE CAIRO CLUB

STRAINED silence followed Vosgle's departure. James Belver broke it with an indignant outburst. He voiced his contempt of Vosgle, saying it was another of the lawyer's tricks. To Belver, Vosgle's apology was a boast of his criminal connections.

"Eunice saw you meet the Morenz woman," Belver told Larry. "It troubled her; she asked me what I thought about it. I am glad that I can tell her that Vosgle was to blame. Oily as ever, he smoothly covered his real purpose. He wanted to injure your reputation, Larry. Eunice will understand."

"I understand already." Eunice spoke for herself, as she entered the living room. "But it wouldn't have mattered" she turned to Larry – "really, it wouldn't have, Larry. I trust you."

"After I lied to you?" Larry's voice was glum. "Telling you that I had to talk to some reporters?"

"Which you did," reminded Belver. "You came to my office first, Larry."

Larry was still remorseful. Eunice stepped close and began to fix his tuxedo tie. Her eyes looked up to his. They were brimming; but her lips had a smile.

"I think I shall leave you," announced Belver, in a tone of understanding. "Sorry, Eunice, I cannot accept your invitation to dinner. Forget Vosgle, Larry" Belver's hand extended for a warm shake. "If you're worried over anything, see me about it."

At the dinner table, Larry remained silent. Eunice spoke consoling words, saying that the fault was hers. She knew that she had been jealous over an imaginary cause. She admitted it, and her sweet tone abashed Larry.

"I was wrong," said Eunice. "You must forgive me, Larry. I care so much for you!"

"You shouldn't!" blurted Larry. Gilbert was out of the dining room; Larry could talk freely. "There's a lot in back of it, Eunice. I'm not the swell fellow your uncle made me out to be. Let me tell the whole story."

THE SEALED BOX

While Eunice listened, Larry gave the facts, plainly, from the start. He spared nothing. He admitted his crimes; told how he had been a pal of Theda's. He described where he had been for the past five years; he gave all credit for his present position to The Shadow; also expressing his debt to Eunice's uncle.

He summed what had happened recently in Southbury; how The Shadow had relieved him of the incriminating sealed box. His eyes lowered as he talked; he couldn't bear to meet Eunice's gaze. He did not see Eunice rise from her chair, to come beside him.

As Larry finished his account, a soft hand settled upon his own. A lovely voice spoke gently:

"All this makes me admire you more, Larry. It proves that my uncle was right. I know you for what you are. What you say you used to be does not matter. You weren't your real self."

Larry came to his feet. He found Eunice in his arms. His words were husky, almost incoherent, but Eunice understood. Larry would tell her later how he loved her. He was beginning to realize that she had given him that right.

THERE were other matters that must be discussed. Both knew it; they were serious when they reached the living room.

"Do you think The Shadow has learned all about the sealed box?" questioned Eunice. "You know, Larry, I met him here the night of my uncle's death. I trusted him, as you did. I believe that The Shadow could tell who placed that box in your room."

"But something has happened to The Shadow," returned Larry. "I know what's happened to the sealed box. Theda has it that's why she talked to Vosgle about money, like he told me."

"Then The Shadow must have been captured by that gang. He may be their prisoner; he may be dead "

"I know it. I'd like to go to the Cairo Club and have it out with Theda. I've got to talk to Burke, though, first." Larry shook his head. "And I know what he will say: To sit tight."

Eunice couldn't understand such policy. Larry explained that it had worked the night before. Clyde was experienced in The Shadow's service; he would want to know more facts before he made a move. Clyde had an amazing confidence in The Shadow's ability to return unharmed from hazardous adventures.

"Maybe Vosgle knows that Theda was talking about the box," said Larry, suddenly. "Don't you see what could happen, Eunice? If I went to the Cairo Club, I might find the box planted on me again. If my past record came to light through Vosgle, or any one I would be sunk.

"Any kind of a tip to the police would do it, once they had me with the box in my possession. That's why The Shadow took it. Vosgle knows well enough that I wouldn't buy the box. Theda is welcome to it. But Vosgle will find out that I'm smart enough not to go after it."

Eunice started to say something. She stopped suddenly. Her eyes had a meditative light. Larry didn't observe it.

"I'm going downtown to see Burke," declared Larry. "I'll only be gone half an hour, Eunice. I'll be back by then, or I'll telephone you."

THE SEALED BOX

Eunice listened to Larry's car as it sped away. Her determination showed itself. Donning an evening wrap, she called Gilbert. She told the servant to give a verbal message to Larry, when he returned.

"Say that I went to the Cairo Club," she declared. "Tell him that it is safe for me to go. I am going to get that sealed box, Gilbert the one that was stolen from my uncle. Above all, keep Larry here."

Hurrying upstairs, Eunice obtained her tiny automatic; she hastened down the back stairway and out to the garage.

At the Cairo Club, a floor show was ending at the time when Eunice started there. Theda Morenz had sung a final song. Waving kisses to the applauding customers, Theda left the floor and reached a tiny office tucked away from the dining room.

One of the Cairo Club rowdies was seated at the office desk. Theda was quick to ask him if there had been any calls. The thug growled in the negative. Theda told him to stay at his post. She was going to her dressing room, to make a change. Before Theda reached the door, the telephone bell rang. Theda made a bounce for the desk.

The thug saw Theda's forehead wrinkle, her lips tighten. Her eyes took on a sudden gleam, as she spoke:

"Yeah, this is Theda Morenz... Sure. I'll be here a while... Yeah... All right, I get it."

Theda hung up, triumphant. She looked at the clock.

"Who was it?" questioned the thug. "Vosgle?"

Theda shot a hard glance. She didn't like names mentioned when unnecessary. The hoodlum muttered an apology. Theda smiled.

"Sure, it was Vosgle," she drawled. "I gave him until ten bells, didn't I? He's coming here, so scram. Post the boys, plenty of them, to keep the way clear in from the back door. A guy like Vosgle don't want to be spotted. Savvy?"

The thug was nodding, on his way to the door. Theda halted him.

"And tell that stooge of a manager to stay out of here," she added. "We don't want him bothering us. There's some other news you can give him, too. Tell him I won't need that grand he was going to dig up for me."

"Vosgle's kicking in with all you asked for?"

"Listen, wise guy we've got the twenty-five grand in the bag. What I'm figuring is how much more we may get out of it. Something big is due!"

More was due than Theda supposed. When she looked into the battered mirror that hung on the office wall, Theda only gave a glance. She didn't see the closet door behind her; she probably wouldn't have noticed its slight motion even if she had looked at it directly.

Eyes were watching Theda. Listening ears had heard her conversation over the wire; her talk with the thug. As soon as Theda left the office, the closet door swung wider. The figure that stepped out was cloaked in black.

The listener was The Shadow!

THE SEALED BOX

Eyes were visible below the slouch-hat brim; their burn was the sort that came from The Shadow's eyes alone. Fingers were drawing on a glove; from the partly uncovered hand glowed a strange, rare gem The Shadow's girasol token of the cloaked master's own identity.

There was another proving factor; a grim one. The Shadow limped as he approached the desk.

His left arm, too, still bore testimony of his crippled state. It was in its sling, which hung beneath the black cloak.

USING his left elbow to hold the telephone in position, The Shadow dialed a number. He held a brief, whispered conversation. That finished, he returned to the tiny hiding place that he had originally chosen. The closing of the closet door brought a shrouding touch to this new mystery.

The Shadow had supplied three remarkable vanishes from the grip of the law. His latest disappearance from Vosgle's prison room topped them, with its uncanny features. When Theda had seen The Shadow, his escape seemed impossible. Yet he had come from that barred room by the time that she had left Vosgle's mansion.

That strange shape that Theda had seen on Vosgle's lawn had been a token of The Shadow. The cloaked being had apparently melted through imprisoning bars to take up Theda's trail.

The Shadow awaited a new opportunity; one that was due in this very room. The office of the Cairo Club was where Theda intended to complete the deal she wanted.

The Shadow intended to be present; if he so chose, he could confront the master-crook when Theda met him. But chances were that The Shadow would let the trail go farther back to Vosgle's, where the sealed box still would be.

There were other chances, that might bring obstacles. The Shadow always allowed for them. That was why he had come here, rather than wait for later developments. But the chance that was already developing was an unexpected one. Theda was to encounter it before The Shadow could learn of it.

In her dressing room, on the far side of the building, Theda paused as she reached for a shoulder strap of her spangled dress. She thought she heard footsteps, cautious ones, just outside her door.

Theda turned to the mirror that fronted the dressing table. Her eyes blinked their alarm, when they saw the door swing inward.

Theda sprang about. In the doorway, she saw a slender girl whose shoulders seemed as white as her strained face. Theda noted the sparkle of a topaz necklace, against a green taffeta gown. The girl was a brunette; Theda recognized her from newspaper photographs.

Eunice Whilton had arrived to settle matters that concerned Larry Sherrin. The girl who loved Larry was facing the woman who hated him.

Theda's scowl was disdainful. She didn't intend to waste time with Eunice. Her hand behind her back, Theda reached a drawer beneath the dressing table; the slide of her fingers was slimy.

Those fingers found the handle of a long-bladed knife. With a whip of her arm and a forward spring, Theda poised the dirk straight toward Eunice's heart.

THE SEALED BOX

A six-inch thrust was all that Theda needed to drive the blade home. She thought that Eunice would quail, or wilt away. Instead, the girl never budged. Her own hand pushed to view at the same instant. From her shoulder, Eunice aimed her .22 straight between Theda's eyes.

Passing seconds showed the pair face to face, ready for an instant duel. A climax was due while The Shadow waited elsewhere!

CHAPTER XVIII. DOUBLE CAPTURE

EUNICE'S paleness was not a sign of lost nerve. Theda was to find that it meant quite the opposite. Eunice was tense, because she knew that she was in the midst of the enemy's camp. She had plenty of grit and she displayed it, once she was sure that she had to deal with Theda alone.

Eunice darted quick glances about the dressing room, then centered upon Theda. Unruffled by sight of hateful eyes and snarly lips, Eunice nudged the automatic forward. Her forefinger gave a significant tighten on the gun trigger. That cowed Theda.

The torch singer released the knife. As it clattered to the floor, Theda raised her hands. Backing toward the dressing table, she gave a snarly whine of defeat.

"Put up that gun," pleaded Theda. Then, with a last effort at bravado, "What are you trying to do, you little fool? Get yourself in for a murder rap?"

Eunice did not loosen her hold on the gun; nor did she withdraw it. Instead, she advanced closer to Theda.

"I have come for the sealed box," announced Eunice, steadily. "You will give it to me. Immediately!"

"So Larry told you about it, huh?" parried Theda. "Well, he had it. Why didn't he keep it for you?"

"The box incriminated Larry," reminded Eunice. "It will do the same with you. It is safe for me to hold it. I want that box, so I can turn it over to the law. Its contents will expose the killer who murdered my uncle."

Theda saw the logic. If the box had been in the dressing room, she would have produced it; not to help Eunice's cause, but because she was badly scared. Theda was as snarly as a jungle beast cornered by a hunter, and she was looking for any chance to escape the threatening muzzle of Eunice's gun.

"I haven't got the box," protested Theda. "It was as hot for me as it was for Larry. I got rid of it."

"To whom?"

Theda hesitated. She heard Eunice demand an answer to the question. Theda winced. Sullenly, she replied:

"I gave it to Vosgle. It's in his safe, at his house."

Theda's eyes gave a sudden glint. Eunice didn't guess the reason until too late. Two brawny thugs pounded in from the open door behind her. As they clutched the girl's arms, one of the crooks plucked away the .22; the other clapped a hand over her mouth.

The struggle that Eunice gave was useless. Within two minutes, her hands were bound behind her; a tight strap held her ankles. Theda plastered a strip of adhesive tape across Eunice's lips; the thugs propped the

THE SEALED BOX

helpless girl in a corner chair.

"WE found this," growled a rowdy to Theda. He displayed Eunice's evening wrap. "It was lying on a chair. We thought it was yours; we was bringing it in, when we heard you talking. Theda was nodding as she picked up Eunice's gun. Juggling the weapon, she gave a hard look toward the door.

"Maybe the boy friend will show up," remarked Theda, "to pull the hero act for his little dearie. You know the mug I mean that Larry boob. I'll post the bunch to be ready for him. If they snag him, they'll bring him along."

"Along?" queried a thug. "Where to?"

"Out to the ravine," returned Theda. "That's where you're taking this dame. Get rid of her!"

One of the toughs growled that he didn't go in for croaking molls. Theda reminded him that Eunice could do a lot of talking; and she added that the job would be covered. The second thug argued with the first, who finally agreed.

Theda, meanwhile, approached Eunice with a tigerish glare. She thrust her hand for the girl's neck; yanked the topaz necklace with a tug that broke the snap. Winding the necklace about her own hand, Theda ordered the thugs to hoist Eunice from the chair.

They complied. Stepping behind Eunice, Theda pulled a topaz ring from a finger of the girl's bound hands. Coming around, she saw the look in Eunice's eyes; their contempt didn't please Theda. She swung her hand in a vicious slap against the girl's cheek.

Eunice didn't wince. That maddened Theda.

"For two bits," she snarled, "I'd claw you into ribbons! With these!" Theda displayed her long, reddened finger nails. "You wouldn't have that snooty look when I got through with you!"

Eunice's brave calm remained. The red welt that appeared on her cheek told that she could take it. Venomously, Theda decided to go through with her threat.

"You're asking for it, cutey "

The thugs intervened as Theda started a one-hand grab for Eunice's throat. They weren't sorry for the girl; they wouldn't have minded watching Theda demolish her. But Theda, herself, had wanted them to get rid of Eunice, somewhere away from the Cairo Club. There was also the question of Larry's possible arrival. Theda hadn't attended to that.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," grumbled Theda, stepping away from Eunice. "There'd be too much evidence to clean up after I mopped the floor with this ritzy frail. Take her away" Theda picked up Eunice's evening wrap "and sling this with her, among the rocks."

There was a compact in the pocket of the evening wrap; Theda felt it thump. She found it was made of platinum, with a tiny watch set in the lid. She appropriated that piece of jewelry also. After that, she hurried from the dressing room.

POSTING thugs to watch for Larry, Theda continued to the office. She was still carrying Eunice's jewels. With a satisfied sneer, she planked the stolen goods on the desk. As she stood there, Theda heard the noise of

THE SEALED BOX

a stopping motor, somewhere outside the window.

Her look became eager. Remembering her scheduled meeting, Theda decided to go out and meet the arrival on the way. Since thugs were posted for Larry, they might blunder and get the wrong man instead.

Theda hurried from the office; as she went, she drew Eunice's revolver from a pocket in her dress. Theda wasn't taking chances, if it happened to be Larry.

The Shadow swung instantly into view. He reached the desk; picked up the articles that Theda had laid there. The Shadow's expert eye recognized the high value of the topaz necklace and the ring. Those tasteful jewels weren't the sort that Theda would purchase.

Nor was the platinum compact, with its tiny, inset watch. The price of that compact would pay for plenty garish trinkets of the type that Theda would choose for adornment.

Having seen the gun in Theda's hand, The Shadow remembered the .22 that Eunice had once held. He paused only, long enough to open the compact. Inside the lid were tiny, engraved initials that proved the link. They were the letters "E. W."

Silent and swift, despite his limp, The Shadow started for Theda's distant dressing room. He was within the cordon of watchful henchmen, but he was too late to overtake the pair who had custody of Eunice. The dressing room was empty when The Shadow reached it.

The Shadow could hear a motor starting at the rear of the building. He headed for a door, a big gun in his right hand. He encountered no one before he reached the back door. Posted guards were no longer watching for Larry Sherrin. They had found him.

It was Larry who had arrived near the Cairo Club. After a chat with Clyde, he had returned to Eunice's home, to learn from Gilbert where the girl had gone. Larry had forgotten all caution when he heard that news.

HEADING openly across a space behind the Cairo Club, Larry was suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of foemen. He went down, fighting, to be smothered within the next half minute.

Six thugs trussed Larry hand and foot; spread adhesive across his mouth. The job was done so quickly, that The Shadow arrived only in time to see what followed.

Four of the mobbies lugged Larry to the sedan where Eunice was already stowed. The other pair came to a coupe close by the building. Theda was there to meet them.

The Shadow, listening from the doorway, could hear Theda's harsh instructions.

"Tail after them," ordered Theda. "If any coppers start trouble, take care of them. The boys ahead know that you'll be looking out in back. I told them."

The Shadow shifted outward into darkness as Theda approached. He let her go through to the office; she could keep her appointment without The Shadow's interference. This was no time for commotion. There were other henchmen in reserve. The Shadow's task lay with that pair who were taking the coupe.

One thug was already sitting behind the wheel, his foot on the starter. The other was getting in from the right, when something halted him. An arm looped over the thug's right shoulder, doubled around his neck in a squeeze that rivaled a boa constrictor's.

THE SEALED BOX

A hard swing of The Shadow's arm brought the thug tumbling to earth. There wasn't a chance for an outcry. His neck jolted, the hoodlum lay inert upon the ground.

The man at the wheel looked toward the open door on the right; he growled for his pal to hurry. Suddenly, he saw the dashlight's gleam reflect from eyes that shone in from the darkness. The driver reached for his gun, belated. Another weapon was already on its way.

Came a long thrust of The Shadow's arm, with a sidelong wrist twist as its finish. The heavy automatic thudded the driver's skull, close behind the ear.

The crook crumpled. He rolled to the door on the left, when The Shadow shoved him there. When The Shadow opened the door, the stunned driver tumbled to the ground.

The coupe rolled from behind the Cairo Club. A whispered laugh came from the lips of the shrouded fighter who had commandeered the car. One-handed, The Shadow had disposed of two foemen. He was on his way to nullify the double capture that crooks had made. The sedan's direction told that it had headed for the ravine road.

IN the sedan up ahead, thugs were goading their prisoners with promises of future misery. Slumped deep in the back seat, Larry and Eunice listened to the details of their intended fate.

"We're not croaking you, bozo," a thug told Larry. "Not yet, anyway. Theda's got a better idea. They're going to find this moll loaded with slugs, down at the bottom of the ravine. The job's got to be tagged to somebody and you're the guy elected.

"Theda says somebody tried to frame you last night. Only, The Shadow queered it. This time, he won't. The cops are going to find you with a gat on you the same rod we're using to croak the moll. The Shadow won't be around to pull you out of this jam."

There were approving snorts from the other mobbies. All seemed to know where The Shadow was, although they didn't give that information to Larry and Eunice. Grimly, Larry was trying to think of a way to overcome the present situation.

If he could get one hand free and he was working hard to do it he might manage a frantic struggle long enough to yank a door open and shove Eunice from the car. It wouldn't help much, for Eunice was bound and gagged; but if a car chanced along before the hoodlums managed to stop and pick her up again, she might be rescued.

The sedan wasn't traveling fast. The road to the ravine had many turns, with white lines on the curves. The car was only averaging thirty miles an hour. With eight miles to go, Larry figured he had about fifteen minutes.

With five of those minutes past, Larry's right hand was loose. Wedged in a corner of the car, he managed to snake his hand downward and loosen a strap that was lashed about his ankles. The lights of another car were flashing through the rear window. Larry hoped that the occupants of the following machine might provide aid for Eunice, if they saw her spill to the road.

His hope died down when the lights of the car in back began to blink. Crooks took it for a signal; for they knew that Theda had ordered a car to follow them. The driver of the sedan slowed and pulled over to the right, as the coupe tried to pass him on a bend.

THE SEALED BOX

Cutting in ahead, the coupe slackened speed. The driver of the sedan did the same, supposing that new instructions were coming from Theda. As the cars halted, the doors on the right of the sedan swung open. Thugs craned from the front seat and the back, expecting to see a pal coming back from the coupe.

Larry curbed himself. He wanted the messenger to bring his news and go back to the coupe. When that car started, Larry would have his best chance to make a break. But the person from the coupe wasn't going back to it at all.

Wondering why no one arrived, a tough beside Larry flicked a flashlight. Its glow came just soon enough to save the thugs from a total surprise. That glare showed a cloaked figure of blackness, starting a silent lunge toward the open doors of the sedan.

The name that four crooks gasped was joyous news to their prisoners. It came from fear-frozen lips:

"The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XIX. THE TRAIL REVERSED

THE SHADOW could have withered those thugs with gunfire, had he chosen that method of attack. Unfortunately, he couldn't risk it, with Larry and Eunice prisoners in the sedan. His plan was to slug down his foemen before they recognized him.

That wasn't a huge order under ordinary conditions. The Shadow had caught the mobbies off guard; his stealthy approach put him almost in their midst. Even the sudden introduction of the flashlight would not have changed the result, normally.

This night, however, The Shadow was handicapped. He had only one hand to use in a slugfest. The light that revealed his surge was bad, in such circumstances.

The Shadow had time to stroke one foeman into oblivion. He took the thug who held the flashlight. A hooking sledge of a big .45 did more than slump the hoodlum. It hauled him clear from the sedan, to the turf beside the road. The flashlight rolled beneath the car. Its glow no longer aided the crooks.

Guns were out; fingers on their triggers. Unable to spy The Shadow, killers were slow with their aim. With a sidestep, The Shadow shoved half into the rear door, from which he had rolled his first victim. This time, he had a chance for fire. The dashlight showed that only crooks were in front. The Shadow aimed.

It was Larry who unwittingly blocked The Shadow's action. Wrenching from his corner, he suddenly grabbed the crook in the back seat. He whipped the thug toward the door; in the grapple, they hit The Shadow shoulder-first. The jolt sprawled The Shadow to the road bank.

A front-seat crook caught a flash of The Shadow's fall; made a leap toward him, firing as he came. He aimed for the spot where he had seen cloaked shoulders disappear, never guessing that The Shadow had rolled lower.

On his back, The Shadow saw that gun stab at an angle just above him. He fired. The thug did a long pitch across The Shadow.

The man behind the sedan's wheel took that lurch for a leap. He thought his pal had bagged The Shadow.

Larry was lashing back and forth with his antagonist; the man at the wheel saw a chance to drop the

THE SEALED BOX

self-released prisoner. He took cool aim for Larry, who was twisted with his back toward the car.

Like a scaly creature from some deep pit, a gloved hand came over the step at the right side of the front seat. It shoved an automatic ahead of it; the dull gun metal scarcely showed in the dim dashlight. Eyes followed; the instant they saw the aiming driver, a gloved finger tugged its trigger.

The murderous thug slumped behind the wheel. His gun slipped from his fingers as his left hand clutched his right shoulder.

Two figures sprawled upon The Shadow. An unlucky slip put Larry beneath the fighter who grappled with him. A revolver started a swing for Larry's head. A gloved fist thrust into the space between; there was a clang, as an automatic stopped the revolver short.

The parry was a clever one. In halting that driving gun, The Shadow not only tilted it askew; he loomed his own gun straight for the thug's eyes.

The fellow made a mad scramble for the road bank. Larry, both hands free, went after him.

LARRY returned within a few minutes, carrying his attacker's revolver. It hadn't taken him long to batter that last opponent into submission. He found Eunice free, uttering grateful words to The Shadow.

She had scarcely finished before The Shadow spoke a warning whisper. He pointed along the road.

A car had stopped, to turn around. Some one coming from Southbury had witnessed the finish of the fray and was hurrying to report it. The Shadow gave brisk instructions to Larry. He wanted him to take Eunice home; then communicate with Clyde.

Larry wanted to give the details of Vosgle's visit to the Whilton mansion, but The Shadow didn't allow time for it. He hurried Larry and Eunice to the coupe.

While Larry was swinging the light car in the road, The Shadow took over the sedan for his own use. He pulled the wounded driver from the car; rested him on the bank beside the others. It wasn't an easy job, one-handed; particularly as The Shadow showed the crippled crook more care than the fellow deserved.

By the time The Shadow was at the wheel of the sedan, the coupe was far from sight.

The Shadow had preferred delay of his own, rather than have more trouble start for Larry. That was why he hadn't kept Larry long enough to help him clear the driver from the sedan. The proof of The Shadow's wisdom came when Larry and Eunice came to a fork, a mile back on the road.

Larry heard a roar from the trees to the left. He took the road to the right; doused the lights as he jammed the brakes. The machine that whizzed past the fork proved to be a police car.

The Shadow's orders were explicit; both Larry and Eunice knew that they should obey them. They had a clear path, if they took a round-about way to Southbury. Larry started on that course; but he told Eunice, ruefully, that he feared The Shadow was in for trouble.

Larry was right. The Shadow was just beginning to turn the sedan in the middle of the road when he heard the police car's roar. Instead of turning farther, The Shadow stepped on the gas and started in the direction of the ravine bridge.

THE SEALED BOX

The police car swung a turn in time to see his tail-lights. A moment later, the cops saw the thugs beside the road.

They didn't stop to find out those men's identities. Others could pick them up. The police car had a trail: the sedan that had flashed around the next bend. Giving the gas, the officers took up the chase.

THE SHADOW was handling the sedan in an amazing, one-handed fashion. He was taking the curves between forty and fifty miles an hour, slithering the car back into control with every sharp bend. His right foot managed the accelerator without difficulty; The Shadow didn't give his weak knee the bother of shifting toward the brake pedal.

Despite his breakneck tactics, he couldn't shake off the pursuing police car. It was built for these roads speedy, with shorter wheelbase than the sedan. As the race neared the fringe of the deep ravine, The Shadow realized that some change of method would be his only hope of eluding this new chase.

Only a mile beyond the bridge that spanned the ravine, was a sizable town. By this time, word could have reached the place. The Shadow's course would be blocked. The Shadow's position was still one that couldn't be explained.

Moreover, he didn't want to continue ahead. He needed to return to the Cairo Club; and he was due at Vosgle's afterward. Only a drastic measure would suffice to produce such results. The Shadow resolved upon one.

The sedan was roaring straight for the spot where the road curved left to the bridge. The slope was slightly upward; hence only a small fence had been provided at the turn. Above the fence were the red sparklers that shined in the glow of The Shadow's headlamps. Beyond, was the edge of the ravine.

Rocks marked the sharp pitch into that gulch; but the tops of trees sprouted into view. Some were fair-size, but most of them were saplings. The soil amid the steep rocks wasn't sufficient to retain a full-grown tree.

The Shadow picked a half-grown evergreen as his target. It looked sturdy enough to serve his daring game. He swerved slightly as he reached the warning sign, but not enough to make the turn.

This time, The Shadow's foot shifted to the brake. He applied it full force, just as the sedan splintered the flimsy guard rail.

The officers in the police car saw the crash. The sedan lurched across the rocks; took a jounce straight for a bristly tree that was beyond the brink of the ravine. The evergreen quivered as the car burrowed deep among its branches. During precarious seconds, the car swayed there; as the officers halted by the broken rail, the sedan took the topple they expected.

What the police failed to see was the figure that beat the sedan to its lurch. The door on the right had opened. From that tilted side, The Shadow picked a sapling just below the stout evergreen. He took a long, leaping dive; his right arm hooked the sapling as he passed it.

The little tree bent like a bow. The Shadow's clinging figure dangled in darkness over the abyss. Roots held; the sapling straightened. The Shadow gained a footing among the rocks.

A crash was sounding before he was back to safety. The sedan's sideslipping rear wheels overbalanced the weight of the front. The car gave an angled roll, turning nose upward as it fell. Sky-pointed lights cleaved a brilliant path as the automobile tumbled. The glow did not show The Shadow. He was past the fringe.

THE SEALED BOX

The staring cops never glimpsed the door on the right of the sedan, for it was out of sight beneath. When they heard the smash of metal against rocks; the long bounces that ended in a final, utter crack-up, they came to a mutual opinion. Whoever was driving that car had gone with it in its hundred-foot plunge to the depths of the stony gorge.

THERE was a path to the bottom of the ravine. Deserting their own car, the officers hastened downward. They found the sedan telescoped upon the rocks. Through the shattered windows, they saw a jumble of upholstery; but no human form mingled with it.

They didn't know that they had pursued The Shadow. Knowledge of that came when a trailing laugh sounded from the top of the ravine. Looking upward, the amazed policemen saw a cloaked figure outlined against the headlights of their own car.

If ever they took The Shadow for a ghost, it was then. His three previous vanishes were trivial compared to this one. Some one had been at the wheel of the wrecked sedan. It must have been The Shadow.

How he had managed to transport himself from the twisted mass of a shattered automobile up to the top of a hundred-foot cliff, was another incredible happening that the Southbury police force would soon discuss with awe.

The bluecoats who stood as witnesses to the seeming miracle were mute. They couldn't shout in answer to The Shadow's challenge. They forgot that they had revolvers in their holsters. They were spellbound, as they saw The Shadow move beyond the glaring lights.

Then the spell was broken. The cops went berserk; yanked their guns, as they started for the path. The lights of their automobile were backing away. The Shadow was taking their car.

His trailing laugh was a mocking reminder that he had left them the wrecked sedan in its stead. The Shadow's humor didn't appeal to the policemen.

It took them ten minutes to reach the top of the precipitous path. By that time, The Shadow was miles away, heading back toward Southbury. He passed cars stopped by the crippled thugs; other machines that were coming from town. Each time he saw lights, The Shadow sounded the police car's siren.

That siren shriek was his passport. Cars shifted from his path. When The Shadow finally used the siren no longer, it was because he had neared the Cairo Club. Parking the patrol car in an obscure spot, The Shadow approached the place on foot.

He saw a car pull quickly from the other side of the club; going out by a driveway that could not be reached except by a roundabout course. The thugs that The Shadow had pitched from the coupe were absent. They had probably reported to Theda. She wouldn't have believed their claim, that The Shadow had slugged them.

Another fighter could have handled that pair singly, the way The Shadow did. Reports of the battle on the road to the ravine had not yet reached the Cairo Club. Hence, Theda didn't have the story that would prove The Shadow's absence from Vosgle's prison room.

NO lookouts guarded the path to the night club's office. That room was empty when The Shadow reached it. Theda Morenz was gone; she had taken Eunice's jewelry.

There was a single explanation to Theda's absence. She had held her scheduled meeting with the master crook. They had left the Cairo Club together.

THE SEALED BOX

The Shadow had lost his opportunity to listen in on their conference. It did not matter; he had already known the probable decision to which they would come. He had simply wanted to make sure. The lost chance was insignificant, compared to the rescue of Eunice and Larry.

Moving through the outside darkness, The Shadow returned to the police car. His whispered laugh was lost amid the strains of music from the dance floor of the Cairo Club.

Crime's knell had sounded. All that was needed was the final stroke. The law would play its part, thanks to The Shadow, though that fact had not yet been announced.

The mystery of the sealed box would be cleared to-night.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XX. THE CASE RESTS

LOOMING in darkness, Vosgle's thick-built house formed a grotesque mass. The windows were dark.

With the owner of the house presumably away on a trip, lights might have caused suspicion. Rufus Vosgle had instructed his servants to darken the house at an early hour.

It was natural that the servants would relax their vigilance during their master's absence. They were few in number; their hours had been long and grueling, ever since The Shadow had been brought as an enforced guest. There was no definite cause why they should expect trouble from outside, according to the reasoning of Theda Morenz.

The torch singer based that opinion on her own observation. She had noted that the only guards on regular duty were those posted to watch The Shadow's cell.

That was why Theda was confident there would be no challenge when she and a pair of creeping thugs reached a spot beside the sun porch. There, Theda ordered her pals to jimmy a window.

They did it, with only a screened flashlight and not enough noise to attract attention.

Theda motioned the thugs away from the window. She stole through the darkness; they heard her whisper to some one waiting there. Soon, the hidden man approached; reached the sill and clambered across it. The thugs heard him creep through the sun porch, into the living room. Theda approached the thugs.

"Stick here," she whispered. "If he needs you, he'll be back blinking a flashlight. You'll know it's him, because he's got a red glass in the flash. I'm going to post the rest of the crew."

The thugs whispered to one another after Theda had gone. Their subdued tones carried chuckles. What the game was, they couldn't guess; but it certainly must be a smart one.

Theda had swung a clever deal tonight. Twenty-five grand paid in advance. She had shown them the crisp bills before they had left the Cairo Club.

As the thugs figured it, Rufus Vosgle had come to terms. He had called Theda before ten o'clock. He had arranged to see her, alone, at the Cairo Club. That was why Theda hadn't let any one be on lookout when her caller sneaked into the club's office.

THE SEALED BOX

Vosgle had paid for silence regarding the sealed box; but he wanted some special services for his money: He wanted to make it look as though his house had been robbed. That was why Theda had told this pair of experts to jimmy the sun porch window. That accomplished, it was easier for Vosgle to do the rest.

Knowing the combination of his own safe, he could open it and strew papers all around. He would take everything of value including the sealed box. In the morning, his own servants would be witnesses to the fact that the place had been rifled during Vosgle's absence.

If they happened to hear Vosgle at work, they might surprise him; but in that case, the lawyer could let the servants in on the game. But he didn't want to do that, if he could help it.

INSIDE the house, there were creaks on the stairway; but the sounds were slight. The crafty prowler reached the door of the office and sneaked directly to the safe. There, his flashlight glimmered.

As Theda had said, it showed a ruddy glow. The spot of light upon the shiny dial was like a vivid splotch of blood.

Steady fingers turned the combination. The door swung open. That probing circle of ruby light gleamed upon the sealed box and the promissory note that lay with it. A hand gripped both; the flashlight went out, as its owner dropped it in his pocket. Shifting back from the safe, the intruder placed his hand upon the cold steel of the door; ready to close it without noise. For a moment, he paused to listen, as if he caught a stir within the room. His hand fished to his hip, to draw a revolver. Before it reached the weapon, there was a click from the wall. Light flooded the room. It showed a masked burglar at the safe, his lips hardened in an ugly scowl below his slitted bandanna. Through the eyeholes of the handkerchief, the intruder saw himself surrounded by men who had risen from the walls.

Some were Vosgle's servants; the rest were detectives, who belonged to the Southbury force!

A stern man in uniform was standing by the wall switch. The crook who clutched the sealed box recognized Police Chief Mulley.

Window shades were tightly drawn to prevent light from reaching the outside darkness. At Mulley's order, the trapped crook let the sealed box fall to the carpet. He came to his feet, his hands upraised. The police chief strode toward him, yanked the handkerchief from his head.

Blinking in the glaring light, the burglar gave a distorted grimace that amazed the police chief. It was the first time that Mulley had ever seen such an ugly expression on the face of James Belver.

Theda hadn't passed the real story to her flock of thugs. She had made no deal with Vosgle. It was Belver who had called her at the Cairo Club. The self-styled reformer was the man who had come there later.

THE police chief was utterly astounded at his own discovery. Mulley had been posted here on the promise that a crook would arrive. He had been told so by Rufus Vosgle; but the lawyer hadn't said who the man would be.

Groping for an explanation, Mulley looked toward a side door of the room. It opened; Vosgle stepped into sight.

Puffing a cigar, the lawyer seated himself behind his desk. He suggested that detectives frisk the prisoner. They did, while Belver stood silent. Vosgle pointed to a chair; Belver glared, then decided to sit down. At Vosgle's request, the police chief brought the sealed box to the desk.

THE SEALED BOX

"Would you care to speak first?" queried the lawyer, dryly, addressing Belver. "You may have some explanation for the fact that you were discovered in the act of burglary."

Belver stroked his chin; he looked around the group. He centered his gaze on the police chief.

"I learned that Vosgle had the sealed box," rumbled Belver. "That is why I came here. In the interest of public justice, I felt that the box should be brought to light."

"Why didn't you tell me the box was here?" demanded Chief Mulley. "If you had such evidence, you should not have kept it from the authorities."

Belver didn't reply. He looked toward Vosgle. Belver didn't like the attorney's odd smile. He figured that Vosgle would get his say in, anyway, so he decided to hear what the lawyer had to offer.

"Let us analyze the circumstances of this case," suggested Vosgle, "as they were pointed out to me by" he paused; added, with a smile "by a friend. One who has an uncanny ability for divining the true facts of a baffling problem."

Pausing, Vosgle drew a sheet of notes from his pocket. He checked off the items as he discussed them.

"Ex-mayor Dylan had a sealed box, containing evidence against a master-grafter," recounted Vosgle. "Dylan died presumably by suicide. His house was ransacked. All his official papers, records, seals, and other items were stolen at that time. It was believed that the all-important box was taken also.

"Later, that sealed box was acquired by Richard Whilton. Two persons saw that box while it was in Whilton's possession: his niece, Eunice; and our present prisoner, James Belver. It was proven later that I could have known that Whilton had the sealed box.

"Eliminating Eunice, we have only two persons: Belver and myself. The only reason why either of us could have wanted the box was because he happened to be the hidden grafter. So one of us" Vosgle's tone was coolly impartial "murdered Whilton and took the sealed box."

BELVER saw a chance for a home thrust.

"You've got the box, Vosgle," he reminded. "That puts the burden on you!"

Belver halted. He didn't like the slow way in which Vosgle's smile returned. The lawyer turned to the police chief.

"Once having the box," declared Vosgle, "the murderer's first deed – his all-important deed would be to open it and destroy the documents that it contained. That would dispose of the only existing evidence that linked him with past graft."

A pause; Vosgle asked: "Am I right, Chief Mulley?"

"Absolutely right," acknowledged the police chief. Then, frowning: "But what about this sealed box on the desk?"

"The murderer had all of Dylan's records and seals," reminded Vosgle: "It was simple for him to forge false documents; to seal them in a box with Dylan's official stamp. And that" Vosgle wheeled toward Belver "is exactly what you did do, Belver!"

THE SEALED BOX

"You forged evidence against me, the only prominent man in Southbury, besides yourself, who could have known that Whilton had the box. To bring the false box to light, you had to plant it on some one other than myself. You tried it with The Shadow, first; then with Larry Sherrin. Both times, you failed!

"To-night, I made you think that Theda Morenz had the sealed box, and wanted a price for it. You went to make a deal with her, only to find that it was I who held the box. You had to regain it, and Theda told you how you could. She had learned the combination of my safe, because I let her. She sold you that information!"

Every one of Vosgle's stated facts had clicked. Belver was glaring; his teeth gritted at thought of the lawyer's shrewdness. It hadn't quite dawned on him that Vosgle was merely acting as spokesman for the person who had actually divined these facts.

Theda had said that The Shadow was Vosgle's prisoner. But she hadn't guessed that Vosgle, knowing The Shadow to be a fighter for justice, had talked openly to the cloaked captive that Theda had brought to his home.

After one brief conference, The Shadow had mustered Vosgle into his service, to arrange a trap for Belver.

The Shadow had been free when Theda saw him in the cellar room. But Vosgle, by The Shadow's own order, had tricked Theda into thinking that his welcome guest was actually a prisoner.

THOSE thoughts were far from Belver's mind. The master-crook was looking for some way to turn the tide to his own advantage. If he could swing Chief Mulley, he might get results. Belver pointed to the sealed box that lay on the desk. He roared the challenge:

"I claim that box to be the one I saw at Whilton's! It belongs to the law! I demand that it be seized!"

"That wouldn't help you, Belver," jabbed Vosgle. "In seeking Whilton's murderer, the police want a man who had a motive to steal the sealed box. You were caught stealing this box tonight. If you claim it to be the original box, you automatically prove that you had a motive to murder Whilton."

"I'll take that chance," scoffed Belver. "When the police open this box "

"The police will not open it," interposed Vosgle. "This particular box" he raised the box between his hands "is my property. I claim that it is not the box mentioned in Dylan's confession; nor is it the box that you saw in Whilton's home. Unless the law can prove otherwise, it cannot take the box."

"But I shall testify that it is the same box "

"That testimony will be delayed, Belver, until after you have been sentenced for to-night's burglary. The unsupported statement of a convicted criminal will not be sufficient."

"Eunice Whilton saw the box when her uncle had it "

"And I can assure you, Belver" Vosgle's tone was confident "that she will accept the facts that I have mentioned. On that basis, she will refuse to swear that this is the same sealed box."

For a moment, Belver retained his defiance. He thought that his own influence was strong enough to swing Eunice's testimony. But, amid that rising hope came startling recollection of something that Theda Morenz had told him on the way from the Cairo Club. Theda had said that Eunice was dead; murdered at her order.

THE SEALED BOX

It had seemed of minor consequence to Belver. Right now, it was of prime importance. Eunice could never testify regarding the sealed box. With that realization, Belver sagged. His hunted look registered guilt; his hands went loose as they plucked the chair arms.

Belver's feeble stare toward the police chief showed that his last shred of defense was gone. That was the alibi Belver had given himself on the night he murdered Whilton.

Belver hadn't gone to city hall to telephone Mulley; then wait there. He had made the call from near Whilton's home. That had given him time for murder, before hurrying to the police chief's office.

Rufus Vosgle looked about the circle of men who had witnessed Belver's defeat. As if addressing a jury, the lawyer spoke:

"The case rests."

Into the silence that followed crept a weird, low-toned laugh, that quivered the very air of that room. As they heard the whispered shudder, listeners turned toward the door to see the burning eyes of a tall, cloaked being whose gaze was fixed on James Belver.

Like the verdict of a presiding judge, The Shadow's solemn tone had declared the murderer's guilt.

CHAPTER XXI. SEALED DOOM

THE SHADOW had come through the loose cordon of surrounding crooks to reach this focal spot. He had foreseen that Belver would hire Theda's thugs to cover his last attempt at lone crime.

This time, The Shadow had arranged the trap. He had let Vosgle spring it, by calling in the law; but The Shadow, himself, intended to see that Belver did not slip the toils.

There was poetic justice in The Shadow's timed arrival. It came when the law recognized through Belver's capitulation that The Shadow had played no hand in helping crime. The Shadow was wanted no longer. Instead, he was recognized as one who had played a master part in behalf of right.

Sight of The Shadow brought a last flare from James Belver. The supercrook sucked his breath inward with a fummy hiss. Every stroke that he had made was a failure against the cloaked avenger, even though Belver had been ready for The Shadow before the black-clad stranger had arrived in Southbury.

Cunningly, Belver had used the police to fight his battles. He had brought them to Whilton's to trap The Shadow there. He had also planted the gold coin a useless clue in itself to trick The Shadow, in case the law failed to capture him.

That trick, too, had failed, when The Shadow broke from the trap in the Central Building. Again, The Shadow had outwitted Belver, when the crook had sent his threat to Cranston. Snatching the sealed box from Larry had been another of The Shadow's swift moves; and to top it, Belver recognized, from the tone of The Shadow's laugh, that the fighter had done more to-night.

Belver could picture one lone reason for The Shadow's delay in reaching here. That was the rescue of Eunice and Larry. In his venom, Belver hoped that they were dead; but his keen wits told him that they were not.

The murderer realized suddenly why The Shadow had come here. The path outside was not clear. There was

THE SEALED BOX

still the problem of the thugs surrounding the house something recognized only by The Shadow and Belver. Faced by the grim picture of the electric chair, Belver had nothing to lose by making trouble; but he did have a chance for gain.

His only wish was that he had started it a few minutes before. Foolishly, he had tried to out argue Vosgle. That had allowed time for The Shadow to arrive.

STILL, Belver had opportunity. His plight drove him berserk. Springing to his feet, he grabbed up the chair from behind him; swung it above his head, as he started for the door.

A gloved hand pushed from The Shadow's cloak. A bulging, automatic offered its halting threat.

That would have insured Belver's finish, if others had not intervened. Detectives and servants pitched upon the fighting murderer, without realizing the mistake they made. They turned the room into a madhouse, with Belver in temporary control.

Fists and gun slashes couldn't stop the crazed murderer. Opponents were falling away as they dodged the wild sweeps of the heavy chair. The Shadow had no chance to end the fray, for bodies were flinging themselves between him and Belver. Sooner or later, the murderer would be flooded; but much could happen meanwhile.

Belver knew it. He dragged the fight to a window. With a whip of the chair, he smashed the shade and the glass beyond it. It was his signal to bring Theda's mob.

The effort was unneeded. Crooks below had already heard Belver's commotion.

Belver's own mad move produced his capture. Opponents piled upon him; dragged him from the window. They flattened Belver across Vosgle's big desk. Spread-eagled, Belver delivered a harsh, pleased shout. He could hear a rush of footsteps on the stairs.

So could The Shadow. He had a remedy.

Swinging out into the hall, The Shadow stood ready with his single automatic. He waited until the first thugs neared the top of the darkened stairs. With his left elbow, he nudged a switch that turned on the lights in the hall below.

Crooks were revealed, a dozen of them. Most of the thugs were on the stairs, with Theda at the bottom goading them with raucous shrieks.

The Shadow gave a sinister laugh of challenge. Crooks could barely see his outlined form. They didn't have much time to look, for The Shadow started a sudden gunfire.

While The Shadow pumped slugs down the steps, revolvers barked upward. They were sharpshooters, these crooks; but they failed against The Shadow. His crippling shots were timed, aimed for sure targets in the light.

Thugs were hasty in their aim, blazing for a hazy, evasive mark. Crooks tumbled; rolling downward, they bowled over the men below them. By the time The Shadow's bullets were exhausted, men were arriving from the room above.

The Shadow sidestepped to let new marksmen take over the battle. They did it with a vengeance. The police chief had brought crack marksmen. Vosgle's servants were good men with their guns. They poured bullets into the lighted space below the stairs, where Theda was firing with the last of the thugs.

THE SEALED BOX

The shots that the crooks offered were all as puny as the squidgy pops from the .22 that Theda had taken from Eunice. They hadn't time to rally, after The Shadow's onslaught. They tried to stampede for the front door, only to be flattened as they ran. Theda, firing alone, went sprawling suddenly at the foot of the stairs.

THE SHADOW had stepped back to Vosgle's office. There, he saw Belver wrestling in the clutches of the lawyer and the police chief. Breaking free, the master-crook lunged for The Shadow; met him in a terrific grapple.

The Shadow went backward, giving ground his only policy, in his injured condition.

Savagely, Belver drove The Shadow against the wall. He shot his big fingers for the cloaked throat, forgetful of The Shadow's right hand, which dropped with its emptied automatic.

For an instant, Belver saw the patched features of Kent Allard, tilted upward; then The Shadow twisted leftward, drove his left shoulder against Belver's chest.

The shift wrenched his neck half free. His right hand swung on a long, rising arc, its gun curving for Belver's skull. The murderer dodged away; threw up a warding arm. He managed only to slow the blow. The thud upon his head half staggered him.

Grotesquely, Belver reeled toward the stairs. Detectives and servants were at the bottom, taking care of the damaged thugs.

Looking downward, Belver saw the whole stairway rolling. He grabbed the banister; half slumped, he picked up a revolver that some thug had dropped. He saw Theda's dead form below; beyond it, men whom he recognized as enemies. Belver gave a huge bellow; he raised his gun.

From the top of the stairs, The Shadow saw the finish. Prepared to leap for Belver, the cloaked fighter wisely dropped back into the second floor darkness, to escape stray shots from the barrage that came. The loyal men below forgot the wounded thugs to take care of the murderer. They did it with a volley of bullets.

With that roar of guns, Belver toppled. Head-first, he pitched to the bottom of the stairs. He was dead before he reached the floor below.

With his final sprawl, the men who had produced it heard The Shadow's solemn whisper from above. There was no mirth in that tone; The Shadow's final laugh was a knell that marked a murderer's end.

ELSEWHERE, a group of three was waiting, wondering about The Shadow. Clyde Burke had been called by Larry; the reporter had come out to Eunice's home. The ring of the telephone bell proved to be a call for Clyde.

Another reporter was on the wire. Clyde listened in amazement to news that had come from Vosgle's house, given on the authority of Police Chief Mulley. Coming back to the living room, Clyde gave the details to Larry and Eunice.

The story wasn't complete; but there was enough of it. James Belver was dead, exposed as the master-crook. The Shadow had brought about his finish, and stood vindicated. Theda Morenz and some of her thugs had died, fighting for Belver. The sealed box was false; Rufus Vosgle had disposed of it.

Eunice and Larry listened; their faces showed profound surprise, against the light of a warming blaze in the fireplace.

THE SEALED BOX

Gilbert had answered a sharp ring of the doorbell. They looked to the hall, to see the servant step aside in awe. Into the living room came The Shadow.

There was a shimmering sparkle from his gloved hand as he opened it. Eunice's necklace and other jewelry dropped into her waiting hands.

From his cloak, The Shadow produced the sealed box, its wires clipped. He opened the lid; brought out a sheaf of papers from within. He displayed the forged evidence that Belver had prepared against Rufus Vosgle. With a toss, The Shadow consigned the papers to the crackling fire.

Closing the box, The Shadow kept it as his only trophy. It went beneath his cloak as he turned toward the door. With a slight limp, he strode past Gilbert; the door closed as the cloaked victor stepped forth into the night.

Clyde hurried after; he had caught a nod from his chief. Larry remained with Eunice; arm in arm, they watched the flaming papers turn to ashes. The mystery box was sealed no longer; instead, The Shadow had sealed the doom of a superfoe.

From somewhere it seemed very far away Larry and Eunice heard the fading trail of The Shadow's parting laugh.

THE END